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ABSTRACT

At a time when schools are expected to do more than ever, it is important for them to forge strong partnerships with others in the community who share their concerns for the well-being and success of children. This guidebook illustrates how principals, teachers, and other members of a school staff can reach out to families and the community to build a system of strong support for the healthy development and learning of their children. The introductory chapter of the guidebook examines what comprehensive strategies for children, youth, and families are; who benefits from comprehensive strategies; and what role the schools play in carrying out these strategies. An overview of the guidebook is also provided. The chapters are as follows: (1) "Building Collaborative Partnerships"; (2) "Conducting a Community Assessment"; (3) "Finding and Developing Resources"; (4) "Evaluating School-Linked Strategies"; (5) "Moving from Vision to Action"; and (6) "Maintaining Momentum in Collaboration." Two appendices list federal support for links between schools and comprehensive strategies, and suggested resources. Contains 21 references. (HTH)

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Putting *the* Pieces Together

ED 396 856

comprehensive school-linked strategies

for children and families

PS 024425

U.S. Department of Education

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Putting the Pieces Together

Comprehensive School-linked Strategies for Children and Families

U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Department of Education
Richard W. Riley
Secretary

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
Sharon P. Robinson
Assistant Secretary

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Gerald N. Tirozzi
Assistant Secretary

Office of Reform Assistance and Dissemination
Eve M. Bither
Acting Director

Working Group on Comprehensive Services
Jeanne D. Jehl
Executive Director

May 1996

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Foreword

Dear Colleagues:

We are pleased to offer you this new publication, *Putting the Pieces Together: Comprehensive School-linked Strategies for Children and Families.* This guidebook is the result of a collaborative partnership among the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education, and the Regional Educational Laboratory Network.

In developing this guidebook, the writers drew from the strength of this partnership to incorporate findings from educational research as well as the experiences of school staff and other practitioners who have worked on school-linked comprehensive strategies for children and families. The guidebook includes numerous brief examples from programs in schools and communities throughout America where diverse stakeholders have come together to create a system that enables children to come to school ready to learn every day.

The guidebook is primarily addressed to school leaders who want to expand their efforts to help children and families succeed. It illustrates how principals, teachers, and other members of a school staff can reach out to families and the community to build a system of strong support for the healthy development and learning of their children. At a time when schools are expected to do more than ever, it is important for them to forge strong partnerships with others in the community who share their concerns for the well-being and success of children.

We hope that *Putting the Pieces Together* helps you and your colleagues make a difference for the children and families in your community.

Sincerely,

Sharon P. Robinson
Assistant Secretary
Office of Educational Research
and Improvement

Gerald N. Tirozzi
Assistant Secretary
Office of Elementary
and Secondary Education

Acknowledgments

This guidebook is the product of the commitment, creativity and experience of many individuals and many organizations. Jeanne Jehl of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), Peter Mangione of WestEd, and Carol Mitchell of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) coordinated the development of the guidebook. Leila Fiester of Policy Studies Associates wrote the final text.

The 10 Regional Educational Laboratories collaborated in developing the content of this document. The core collaborative group included Peter Mangione and Patty Molloy, WestEd; Judy Caplan and Stephanie Lubin, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory; Helen Nissani and Tim Speth, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory; and Yvonne Becerra, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Other contributors were Carol Perroncel and Karen Simon, Appalachia Educational Laboratory; Dan Jesse and Judy Northup, Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory; Nancy Klein, Northeast Laboratory and Islands; Karen Aka, Pacific Regional Educational Laboratory; Robert Bhaerman, Research for Better Schools; and Nancy Livesay, SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education. Sally Ianiro provided assistance with the writing; Kimiko Chan, Kimiko Chan Design, created the design and layout; Joy Zimmerman, WestEd, reviewed the final document; Fredrika Baer, WestEd, prepared this publication for printing.

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U.S. Department of Education staff members, Carol Chelemer, Gil Garcia, and Lynn Spencer from OERI and Patricia McKee from OESE reviewed drafts of the guidebook and provided valuable insights, critiques, and recommendations. Robert Stonehill of OERI provided guidance and support throughout the development of the guide.

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Introduction

What are comprehensive strategies for children, youth, and families?

Who benefits from comprehensive strategies?

What role do schools play in comprehensive strategies?

Schools, families, and communities across the country — from rural Washington to suburban Missouri to New York City — are developing partnerships that help children and youth, families, and neighborhoods succeed. These broad-based alliances use a range of strategies to build individual skills and local opportunities; improve access to education, health care, and human services; and combine, coordinate, and align community resources and systems. For example:

- At an elementary school in California, a family resource center funded by the state's Healthy Start initiative includes four social workers, nurses, and a family advocate, who all work together with students and families. The center offers on-site human services, parent education classes, mental health care, and drug abuse rehabilitation. A multidisciplinary team designs individual service plans for participants, provides activities on site, and monitors progress toward long-term goals (Wechsler & Golan, 1995).
- The New Jersey School-based Youth Services Program establishes "one-stop shopping" for health care, mental health and family counseling, job and employment training, and substance abuse counseling — before,

during, and after school. Many of the program's 45 sites also offer teen parenting education, transportation, day care, and tutoring.

- The Sandtown-Winchester Community Center, located in the Baltimore Empowerment Zone, is part of a community-based effort, with strong linkages to local schools, to revitalize a neighborhood and its residents. The center links multiple agencies and community partners to provide after-school tutoring, recreation, and arts programs; a family support and development unit staffed by family advocates; a literacy laboratory; programs for senior citizens; health education; emergency services; a neighborhood improvement association; and several employment and training programs.

These collaborative efforts are crucial to the success of children and families who have difficulty benefiting from traditional service and support programs. Traditional programs tend to approach their clients in terms of problems that need treatment, without helping them develop long-term skills or preventive behaviors. Their complex service delivery systems and eligibility requirements are confusing and intimidating for many families, especially those who have low levels of literacy, are not native English speakers, or are newcomers to this country. And many traditional programs are simply unavailable to those who lack transportation or child care or whose work schedules conflict with program hours.

What Are Comprehensive Strategies for Children, Youth, and Families?

Many schools, parents, human service agencies, churches, nonprofit and volunteer organizations, businesses, and local governments are realizing that by working together they can design strategies that respond to local conditions more effectively and use community resources more efficiently. These partnerships design **comprehensive strategies** to bring together a

range of resources including education, health, mental health, child care, social and recreational services to strengthen families and promote the healthy physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of children. Comprehensive strategies are similar to projects described as **school-based coordinated services** in that they often provide centralized access to an array of programs and supports. But while comprehensive strategies may include school-based components, they are broader and more far-reaching endeavors.

Truly comprehensive strategies:

- help children, parents, and families by building community resources and relationships;
- help children, parents, and families solve immediate problems and develop the capacity to avoid future crises;
- build collaboration among all of the community's major groups and cultures, including parents, churches, and a range of agencies and organizations in addition to schools;
- involve multiple stakeholders in all stages of program planning, design, and implementation;
- communicate in languages that are accessible to all partners; and
- flow from a shared vision about improving long-term conditions for children, families, and communities — not simply a goal of providing services or treating a problem.

This guidebook explores the issues involved in creating and maintaining these innovative and inclusive school-linked strategies.

Who Benefits from Comprehensive Strategies?

Children and families benefit from comprehensive strategies on many levels: they get help facing immediate challenges, learn lifelong methods for improving their own circumstances, gain access to an integrated and streamlined system of continuous human development, and become better able to participate in their own learning. For example, the evaluation of California's statewide Healthy Start program of school-linked services showed significant improvements for core participants in meeting family needs for food, clothing, funding for emergencies, and health and mental health (Wagner & Golan, 1996). Ultimately, children become more ready and able to learn — and more likely to stay in school and benefit from high-quality learning experiences.

Teachers, principals, counselors, nurses, and other school staff also benefit from comprehensive, school-linked strategies. Every day, these practitioners and administrators see that hunger, lack of medical care, inadequate child care, poverty, teen pregnancy, violence, and other social conditions create barriers to students' learning. Through comprehensive strategies, school staff gain allies they can turn to — both inside and outside the school — to help address these challenges. As one principal in a diversely populated school observed, comprehensive strategies change the school atmosphere and the way teachers feel about teaching; teachers feel reassured that they are not alone in working with children and families to remove barriers to learning.

Increased interaction between school and community partners builds trust and understanding among collaborators and institutions and helps schools become more aware of ways they can stimulate family and community strengths to support children's success. As they participate in

collaborative partnerships, families and community members begin to relate to the school and its staff with more respect and openness. School violence may decline. Teachers often feel more relaxed, safer, and less distracted by crises that interfere with teaching. Attendance often improves among students and teachers.

By improving student readiness and the conditions for learning, school-linked comprehensive strategies also contribute to academic achievement and to other education improvement efforts. Comprehensive strategies share with innovative teaching approaches:

- an expectation that all students can succeed given appropriate opportunities to learn;
- a commitment to including the voices of parents and helping them become involved in their children's learning;
- an emphasis on collaboration between schools and public/private sector coalitions, universities, and teacher networks;
- a commitment to engaging the entire school in long-term solutions; and
- shared accountability for collaboratively defined objectives.

In addition, comprehensive school-linked strategies involving families and communities make new resources available for achieving the national education goals (see box below). In the context of broad-based, collaborative partnerships, all of the stakeholders who share these goals for academic and human achievement can join together to bring resources to children and families.

Finally, broad-based comprehensive strategies ensure that diverse stakeholders have a voice in changes that will affect them. An emphasis

on community strengths and resources keeps partners focused on building capacity among individuals and organizations, rather than on finding stopgap solutions to problems or deficits. The core of a collaborative partnership — the comprehensive view of how to expand people's opportunities — helps partners focus on real issues rather than their symptoms. And when entire communities are involved in framing these issues and exploring strategies, every stakeholder's effort becomes magnified.

The National Education Goals State that by the Year 2000:

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3. All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography. Every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in the modern economy.
4. U.S. students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
5. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
6. Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
7. The nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all students for the next century.
8. Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.

What Role Do Schools Play in Comprehensive Strategies?

Developing a truly comprehensive perspective is a delicate but rewarding balancing act. It involves planning, experimenting, learning, communicating, revising, assessing, and trying again. This process presents a continuous learning experience for school staff as well as for the children and families who participate in these programs.

In school-linked comprehensive strategies, schools are no longer isolated providers of a single component — education for children and youth — but active partners in a broader effort. As partners, schools have increased cooperation, communication, and interaction with parents, community groups, service providers and agencies, local policymakers, and other stakeholders. School staff share their knowledge and experience with the community beyond the schoolhouse walls — and return with fresh inspiration to guide policies and practices within the school. Within these partnerships:

- All partners begin to view children as members of families and communities, not as isolated individuals. For school staff, understanding the context in which children live can help teachers select the most appropriate methods to improve students' learning.
- By participating in preventive, capacity-building strategies, such as early childhood and family support programs, schools and their partners can play a major role in building strength and resiliency among students, families, and communities.
- Instead of focusing only on short-term results — test scores, attendance rates, and disciplinary incidents — school staff can link with partner agencies to help families accomplish lifelong learning objectives, including adult literacy and job training.

As schools incorporate these ideas into their daily work, all types of staff will collaborate in developing goals, evaluating program effectiveness, representing the school as a community partner, and developing successful strategies for working with parents and community.

Overview of the Guidebook

This guidebook draws on research and experience in developing comprehensive school-linked strategies to help front-line practitioners apply these strategies to their own situation. The ideas, issues, and solutions presented here can help schools and their partners at various stages of program design, implementation, or modification. Because comprehensive strategies vary according to local contexts and partnership dynamics, this book is not a step-by-step guide. Rather, this is a resource book for planning, learning, and doing — a source of practical advice from other practitioners that can help partners pull together a unique, creative response to the conditions of children and families in their community.

This book moves through the essential phases of building comprehensive strategies, with emphasis throughout on the learning that must occur during each part of the process. Chapter 1 explores the process of building collaborative partnerships. Chapter 2 addresses community assessment. One important feature of school-linked strategies is the ability to use and combine resources in new and creative ways; and Chapter 3 reviews some effective strategies for finding and developing these resources. Chapter 4 explains the process of designing and incorporating evaluation in order to provide continuous feedback on progress toward a partnership's goals. Chapter 5 prepares partners to move from designing

strategies to implementing activities. Chapter 6 discusses the issue of maintaining a partnership's vitality once programs are in place.

The chapters do not represent consecutive steps that readers should follow. Although it helps to build a partnership and conduct an initial community assessment before developing a program design, you will find that activities such as resource development, evaluation, partnership building, assessment, and program maintenance occur continuously and simultaneously.

Each chapter is based on key questions that collaborators ask as they bring their vision of school-linked comprehensive strategies into reality. Each chapter also includes real-life examples, references to additional sources of information, and a section on using the information to promote learning among partners. Appendix A contains a description of federal legislation that aids schools in their work with families and communities, and Appendix B provides a list of suggested resources.

Additional Resources on School-linked Services

The Family Resource Coalition (FRC) has an extensive list of publications on developing and implementing school-linked services, including **Family Support and School-Linked Services** (FRC Reports, Fall/Winter 1993). The FRC is also developing regional networks of family resource centers. Contact: FRC, 200 South Michigan Ave., 16th Floor, Chicago, IL 60604.

The National Community Education Association (NCEA) provides publications and training opportunities for community members and school staff to promote the use of schools as a resource for the community. Contact: NCEA, 3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91A, Fairfax, VA 22030-2401.

School-linked Comprehensive Services for Children and Families: What We Know and What We Need to Know, is published by the U.S. Department of Education. This report is based on findings of a conference jointly sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement and the American Educational Research Association. It includes descriptions of exemplary school-linked service programs and interprofessional development programs. Contact: U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954. The stock number is: 065-000-00754-1.

Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning, published by the U.S. Department of Education, is a resource for partnerships and family involvement in learning. Contact: 1-800-USA-LEARN.

Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Profamily System of Education and Human Services (Melaville & Blank with Asayesh, 1993), is jointly published by the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This guide includes information on initiating collaborative efforts, building trust and ownership, developing strategic plans, selecting and training staff, and adapting and expanding successful strategies. It also includes profiles of four successful partnerships. Contact: Single copies are available without charge while supplies last from the U.S. Department of Education, National Library of Education (800-424-1616). Additional copies can be obtained from: U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-9328.

Chapter 1

Building Collaborative Partnerships

How do collaborative efforts get started?

How does a collaborative partnership plan for action?

THE AXIOM THAT TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE REALLY IS TRUE when it comes to strengthening children and families in a holistic way. By thinking, planning, and working together, the individuals and groups that make a community can accomplish goals that neither could achieve alone.

Diverse stakeholders shape their holistic efforts through **collaborative partnerships.** These partnerships give communities a structure for organizing, planning, and implementing their ideas. Collaborative partnerships are the mechanism for designing **comprehensive strategies** that strengthen children and families.

The process of building a collaborative partnership is multidimensional. It involves:

- recognizing opportunities for change;
- mobilizing people and resources to create changes;
- developing a vision of long-term change;
- seeking support and involvement from diverse and nontraditional partners;
- choosing an effective group structure;
- building trust among collaborators; and
- developing learning opportunities for partners.

Although the effort takes time and requires careful attention, it's essential to creating strong, viable partnerships that produce lasting change. This chapter addresses the work that collaborative partnerships typically engage in as they begin and as they move toward action.

How Do Collaborative Efforts Get Started?

There are many catalysts for comprehensive partnerships. Some form when school leaders or local policymakers initiate collaboration. Others begin when a community becomes aware of an urgent need for change, or when funding becomes available to respond to conditions in the community. For example, a school superintendent, notified of new public or private funds for comprehensive services, may work with teachers, parents, and community agencies to develop school-linked strategies for health care, adult education, child care, job preparation, and violence prevention programs. Or, school staff may initiate collaboration with the community to respond to a recognized need:

Comprehensive partnerships begin because individuals reach out to like-minded people and groups to address issues that affect children and families.

In rural Kentucky, school staff learned of a developmentally delayed preschool child whose parents had been unaware of the community services available to them but were willing to work with school, health, and human service providers to enroll the child in a preschool program. Agency staff formed a team to support the parents' efforts to work with their child at home. They also helped the father enroll in a job training program. Encouraged by the success of this collaboration, the team decided to formalize its partnership in order to tackle similar issues.

Sometimes, parents initiate collaboration:

In Salinas, California, a small group of Spanish-speaking families with seriously ill children formed a support group for children and families. Partners included the American Cancer Society; a Spanish-speaking outreach liaison from the school district; and Healthy Start, a state initiative that links families with multiple community agencies and providers. The families meet weekly at the Healthy Start center to learn about local services and to support each other as they confront their children's problems. The partnership has been so successful in empowering parents that some participants have begun to provide leadership to other Healthy Start projects.

Once an individual or small group of planners lights the spark of collaboration, school leaders join with families, community leaders and representatives, and health and human service providers to forge individual programs into comprehensive strategies. This core group evolves into a collaborative effort by (**1**) understanding the context for collaboration, (**2**) expanding to include parents and other community partners, (**3**) forming a partnership, and (**4**) establishing an effective governance structure.

Understanding the Context for Collaboration

Before you can determine how to develop comprehensive strategies in your community, you will want to know what local conditions will support or inhibit a collaborative effort. You can learn about the school's readiness for collaboration by talking with school administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff; parents and parent-teacher organization leaders; and teacher union leaders. At the school district level, Title I coordinators, volunteer coordinators, and other program administrators can explain the district's policies, practices, and perspectives. In the community, religious leaders, city or county council members, and representatives of neighborhood and youth-serving organizations can provide useful insights into the potential for a comprehensive partnership.

Be sure to involve community members, parents, and other partners in developing an understanding of the context for collaboration. You may want to consider the following questions:

Which stakeholders have an interest in the partnership you are planning?

Who might be willing to join your collaboration? Will the attitudes and culture of the school, the school district, and the community support the partnership?

Are the school, district, and other potential partners willing to share their resources and capacities?

How do the interests of each potential partner fit into the broader collaboration? How can administrators of specific programs (e.g., Title I, special education, school volunteers) join with other partners in a unified effort?

Expanding the Involvement of Families and the Community

It isn't enough to simply round up the "usual suspects" — the core group of teachers, parents, and business leaders who already participate in

collaborations between schools, families, and communities. If your comprehensive partnership is going to have a complete picture of community strengths, conditions, and resources, you'll want to enlist families and community leaders who may be disenfranchised from traditional groups but still have their finger on the pulse of important segments of the community.

Don't wait for these stakeholders to walk through the schoolhouse door; send representatives from your planning group to neighborhood association meetings, the city planning office, and cultural and community centers to invite these players to join your partnership. Try to enlist people who truly understand and are committed to the goals of your partnership — not those who are simply assigned by their supervisors to collaborate. You can also increase the investment of potential partners by asking them to help collect information about the local context for collaboration.

Forming a Partnership

As your partnership begins to take shape, you will want to make sure you are attracting appropriate participants to the collaborating table — and that they can work effectively once they get there. Experienced partnerships offer the following advice:

- **Ensure a broad-based, inclusive partnership** by seeking partners who represent a cross-section of the community: parents, principals, teachers, counselors and other school staff, cultural and religious leaders, health care and human service providers, business and political leaders, staff and administrators from community organizations, and representatives from local universities and student groups. Make sure your partners reflect diverse perspectives, experiences, cultures, and levels of authority.

- **Don't wait for all partners to get on board before moving forward** with your plans. Most partnerships expand gradually over time. For example, in one community a partnership that focused on school-linked strategies eventually joined forces with a partnership concerned with community policing. The joint effort, dubbed "Peace Builders," built capacity for conflict resolution and supported community policing strategies. As the entire community gradually embraced the idea, the size and impact of the new partnership grew.

- **Secure a commitment to collaboration.** You may want to ask partner organizations to designate representatives' names and responsibilities in writing; this makes it more likely the same people will be at the table every time the group meets. It also helps move decisions along quickly if organization representatives are authorized to make commitments for their employers.

Once your partners are in place, you are ready to establish a governing structure for the partnership. Take some planning time to consider the following questions:

Will responsibility be shared equally, or will one partner take the lead?

How will decisions be made among partners?

The answers to these questions will be shaped by the extent to which partners share goals, responsibility, and authority; the comprehensiveness of the partnership and its strategies; and the level of resources and policy support for the collaboration.

Establishing an Effective Governance Structure

There is no prescription for the ideal size or design of a leadership group. However, in many communities a two-tiered approach to governance helps partners balance the need for broad oversight with practical considerations. A small management group (10-15 members) that can respond quickly to immediate concerns has responsibility for day-to-day management, while a larger oversight group (30-50 members) meets periodically to consider long-term issues and ensure diverse representation.

Partnerships often use one of the following strategies to create a governance structure that encourages collaboration:

- **Select a lead agency.** One organization — often the school — may be selected to manage the school-linked partnership. "Linkages to Learning," a partnership for school-linked comprehensive services in Montgomery County, Maryland, is led by the county health and human services department's division of children, youth, and family services. This agency coordinated the community assessment, contacted potential partners, organized initial meetings, and developed a memorandum of understanding among other partner agencies. It continues to facilitate planning retreats for program staff, provide a coordinator who organizes partnership meetings, and contribute the majority of staff members. To ensure that the lead agency does not

assume undue influence or bear an unfair burden, partners must devise ways to involve all agencies and organizations in decisionmaking — for example, by rotating the responsibility for conducting meetings among partners.

- **Create a new nonprofit agency.** Privately funded ventures, such as the Cities in Schools partnerships, often formally set up a new agency to manage comprehensive school-linked strategies. This approach frees collaborators from the constraints of existing institutions and opens the possibility for change. However, partnerships that choose this strategy need ample time and support to allow schools, agencies, and other organizations to coordinate their efforts with the new entity.

- **Build a consortium of agencies.** In contrast to a new agency, a consortium is an informal organization established and run jointly by the partners. It ensures shared leadership and collaboration and requires that partners be involved in multiple aspects of the collaboration on an ongoing basis. For example, the Local Investment Commission (LINC) in Kansas City, Missouri is guided by a 36-member consortium whose members range from chief executive officers of local corporations to low-income parents. A "professional cabinet" of service experts advises the consortium in its focus on professional development and comprehensive neighborhood services for 16 communities. In addition, three permanent committees address such critical implementation issues as financial management and operations, data and evaluation, and communication and advocacy. This governance structure allows each individual and group to contribute specific expertise to the consortium, and streamlines the decisionmaking process of the larger consortium by having smaller working groups attend to the details of issues such as financial planning.

Creative Approaches Can Increase a Governance Group's Effectiveness

A large governing group can form subgroups to build communication and trust, and prepare members to address specific topics. For example, the oversight committee of one partnership has 50 members who break into subgroups with each subgroup including parents, school staff, agency representatives, and community members. Representatives from all of the stakeholder groups also participate in a 12-member governance group to provide ongoing policy direction. Small groups provide opportunities for parents and other partners to get to know each other personally, before they work together in larger settings.

Providing a variety of options for participation enables many types of partners to contribute to your efforts. Some people work best in small groups, while others prefer large committees. Some partners make powerful presentations, while others contribute best by writing down their concerns and impressions.

The use of jargon-free language and bilingual translators is essential to help all partners understand the issues and feel that their contributions are valued. When everyone has the opportunity to discuss ideas together, partners arrive at a common understanding.

How Does a Collaborative Partnership Plan for Action?

Evolving collaborative partnerships often struggle between the desire to take immediate action and the need to plan for a sustained effort. There is no specific formula for how much time and energy to initially allocate for building relationships or for planning strategies, but experienced partnerships agree that both activities are essential to long-term success.

Planning for action involves (**1**) establishing guidelines for partner relationships, (**2**) defining a target community, (**3**) creating trust and a shared vision among partners, and (**4**) building cultural awareness. These steps take time, but they lay a firm foundation for future action.

Establishing Guidelines for Partner Relationships

The challenge of putting collaboration into action raises many practical issues:

> Where will the partners meet to conduct business? Will one agency's facilities be used, or will meetings rotate among several facilities?

Who will attend the meetings? What time(s) of the day or week are most convenient for them?

How will child care be provided?

How often will the group meet? Will it meet for the same purpose every time? How long will meetings last?

Who will determine the agenda for each meeting? How and when will partners submit agenda items?

Will the position of chairperson rotate or remain stable?

Who will distribute briefing materials to participants? Who will record and distribute meeting minutes?

Will tasks be delegated to subcommittees? If so, which ones? Who will staff subcommittees, and how will topics and members be selected?

How can the meeting format best accommodate communication styles and preferences within the community? (For example, are informal meetings with refreshments best?)

Clear guidelines and procedures that address these issues can help ensure effective communication, minimize misunderstandings, and enhance collaboration among partners and agencies. Guidelines are an important part of team building and collaboration; the process of deciding how to work together can actually bring diverse stakeholders together.

The guidelines your partnership chooses should be based on the unique context of your community. However, two general strategies can help most partnerships work effectively:

- **Share the spotlight; seek input from all partners.** In a truly collaborative effort, partners relate to each other on a non-hierarchical basis, regardless of the organizational structure (Jehl & Kirst, 1992). No single agency, organization, or individual should dominate or control the decisionmaking process. You can promote this balance by setting goals for your comprehensive partnership that are broader than the goals of any participating agency or individual and cannot be reached through the efforts of any single group.

- **Include families in decisionmaking.** Parents bring unique perspectives and skills to partnerships and are knowledgeable about the community's cultures and languages. Parents remind

school professionals that their issues require more complex solutions than simply creating a new categorical program, and parents can educate other partners by describing what they and their children experience in the community outside the school or agency. By involving families in decisionmaking, emerging partnerships may find strategies that eluded professional staff and also demonstrate that families are respected as full partners. However, the schedules of working parents may make it hard for them to participate unless the partnership schedules meetings on evenings or weekends — and provides child care.

Tips for Taking Action: Guidelines and Procedures for Shared Decisionmaking

Partners often use the following approaches:

Group consensus. Decisions made by consensus require input from each member and agreement that he or she understands, supports, and is willing to implement the group's decision. This method is ideal for partnerships because the process requires thorough discussion of alternatives, allows all voices to be heard, and fosters commitment. Consensus decisionmaking can be time consuming. To reach a decision in the time allotted, groups sometimes have to resort to another method such as majority rule.

Committee decisionmaking. Sometimes a few members are appointed to a committee to decide an issue on behalf of the full membership. This process expedites work; however, not all members of the larger group may support the committee's decision. If the larger group frequently overrides decisions, committees may begin to question their investment of time and effort.

Majority Rule. With this approach, the greatest number of votes carries the decision. Because it is a winner-take-all method, it may erode participants' commitment to collaboration and is probably most useful for deciding minor issues.

Defining a Target Community

Defining a community involves (**1**) identifying a group or groups of people with whom the comprehensive partnership should focus its efforts, and (**2**) choosing a location or locations for partnership activities. Both steps require collaboration and inclusiveness.

The multiple stakeholders who form a partnership often work with different communities, based on geographical location, service boundaries, funding constraints, and other factors. As schools, agencies, and community organizations build collaborative efforts, they cannot

assume that all children or families interact with the same agencies and organizations. (If they did, comprehensive strategies might not be necessary.) So, a collaborative partnership must determine which community or communities it will work with and eliminate any barriers that prevent children and families in the community from benefiting from the comprehensive strategies.

To define your target community, consider the following factors:

Are there specific issues such as the concerns of individuals with disabilities, needs of different age groups, or other conditions that can and should be addressed through the partnership?

What physical or geographical boundaries may affect the community, and how?

Are there political, social, or cultural factors to consider? For example, will policies for busing complicate the participation of any populations? Will gang rivalry or a reluctance to cross neighborhood boundaries prevent some residents from participating?

Will non-English-speaking families or families new to this country be reluctant to participate in activities located at a school or other official institution?

Does affordable, accessible transportation exist to link your chosen community with the operating sites you have chosen?

Community members are the best source of information about many of these factors, and their input is vital.

Creating Trust and a Shared Vision

In many communities, the partners who join a collaborative group may not have worked together before; they may not even know each other, or they may come from organizations with long histories of conflict and competition. And although diversity among partners gives multiple stakeholders a voice in the comprehensive partnership, it can also mean differences of opinion about issues involving children, youth, and families and the best strategies for addressing them. In order to shape a group of diverse individuals into a focused, trusting, effective partnership, you will need to find common ground and develop a unified vision for success.

Find common ground. Take time to help partners familiarize themselves with each other and with the participating agencies. As discussion develops around general issues affecting children and families, encourage your

partners to exchange specific ideas, perceptions, and concerns. Discussion topics may include:

- how local schools, agencies, and organizations operate;
- what activities each partner conducts, and with whom;
- families' perceptions about education, health care, and human service providers;
- how organizations are funded, how funds are allocated for activities, and how much is spent on each activity; and
- the effect of state and federal policies on agencies' ability to work with children, youth, and families.

Develop a shared vision. For example, a comprehensive partnership in El Paso County, Texas, developed a vision statement focusing on families, schools, and communities. The vision for each of the three groups began with a broad objective — such as, "Schools actively involve families and communities in their operation" — followed by specific goals such as:

- Campuses are open to the community, not just young children and students, for a wide array of child care, educational, health, and social services.
- Service providers, parents, teachers, and administrators . . . share responsibility for education goals as well as the services offered at the school.
- Higher education institutions . . . reach out to rural communities so that student teachers, especially those from the community, can teach in rural community schools and be supervised by university staff.

As you explore perspectives within the group and find common ground, you can begin to shape a vision that will guide your partnership. This process will evolve from discussions to consensus to a final written vision statement that reflects the conditions, interests, and issues of the community's many groups and organizations. The vision statement expresses your partnership's dreams, aspirations, and concerns for children, families, and the community. The vision may include concrete goals, but it also encompasses broader purposes.

Because a shared vision sets the tone and direction for school-linked comprehensive strategies, it's worth investing time in formulating and reviewing your vision. This is an opportunity for you and your partners to think creatively about traditional strategies and to imagine innovative changes.

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The process of developing a shared vision is open-ended and exploratory (Kagan, 1994). It requires partners to set aside individual and agency-specific views in favor of a broader, community-wide perspective. The vision statement should reflect the fact that fulfilling the vision will require collaboration among all partners, so they are prepared for the collaborative nature of the path they have chosen.

Tips for Taking Action: First Steps in Formulating a Vision

Visit existing school-linked comprehensive strategies. Arrange for administrators, agency representatives, school staff, parents, and other partners to visit nearby school-linked programs. Seeing other efforts first-hand brings the concept home and starts creative ideas flowing.

Build shared ownership. Solicit ideas from all participants during the visioning process to promote inclusion. Write down ideas as they emerge to validate the contributions of all participants.

Use a variety of approaches to capture ideas. Remember that some people express themselves better in nonverbal ways. Use pictures, charts, diagrams, and color-coded lists to relay participants' ideas.

Develop resources to support the local effort. Even a contribution of $150 from a local service club provides something tangible to move the effort forward — for example, postage and printing for flyers or child care for a community meeting.

Building Cultural Awareness

Collaborative groups function most effectively when participants recognize, understand, and value cultural diversity. As you establish guidelines, define a target community, and develop your collective vision, try to learn about the cultures of individuals and groups in the community.

Ethnic groups, organizations, and communities each possess a distinct culture. A group's culture includes the informal rules, beliefs, and practices that guide interaction but are invisible to those outside the culture (Boyd, 1992). Encourage your partners to consider the following questions:

How is each organization's culture reflected in its policies, procedures, and practices and in the beliefs, values, and behavior of its staff?

How might cultural factors affect the way a partner or family participates in comprehensive strategies?

Does each partner organization support collaboration and a focus on children and families, or are these concepts likely to be met with resistance and lack of understanding?

How might the partnerships's goals and vision be affected by cultural factors?

Parents and community leaders are valuable sources of information about cultural diversity. They can provide insights into the match (or mismatch) of cultural beliefs, values, and practices between families and institutions. For example, staff involved in a comprehensive partnership may unwittingly contribute to cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding by making direct eye contact (a sign of disrespect in some cultures) or by scheduling appointments on families' religious holidays. Parents can bring these concerns to the attention of other collaborators and suggest solutions that bridge cultural differences.

Parents and other community members help the partnership bridge cultural differences and support the home cultures.

Learning Opportunities

The process of creating comprehensive strategies offers opportunities for learning at every stage. As collaborators join forces and begin to work together, they need to learn about:

- each other and the community groups, organizations, and agencies that they represent;
- the community and its cultures, assets, and traditions;
- the conditions and strengths of children and families in the community; and
- strategies that have been successful in similar communities and settings.

Collaborative partnerships often bring together individuals with very different knowledge bases, attitudes, and assumptions. Each partner possesses unique knowledge and skills that can benefit the others. As partners organize, plan strategies, and move forward, they create learning opportunities for themselves and each other.

It is tempting for new efforts like comprehensive school-linked strategies to "just do it" — to assess, plan, and organize for action as

quickly as possible in order to begin program implementation, leaving "staff development" for a later time. But the time it takes to build knowledge and support is essential if you want partners to reflect on the effort as they develop it and develop a shared understanding of the work they are doing. This is the real work of a partnership: to build a community of learners by allowing different stakeholders to come to consensus and common understanding.

Because developing a partnership is essentially a learning process, it is artificial to separate "professional development," "parent education," and "community involvement" from the rest of the work. This guidebook is organized to promote opportunities for learning in every phase of building the partnership, organizing for action, and maintaining momentum; each of the following chapters will provide suggestions for reflective learning and engagement.

Learning Among Partners

As collaborators initially come together, they need to spend a considerable amount of time learning about each other and the community. For example, school superintendents and heads of other public agencies often do not know each other, despite years of working in the same community. "Horizontal" relationships (among people at the top levels of partner organizations) need to be built, as do relationships that span roles in the community — for example, between parents and agency staff. The goal is to develop a sense of collegiality and common purpose throughout the partnership.

Successful partnerships suggest the following approaches to create learning opportunities for partners:

- **Conduct "cross-learning" exercises** in which each partner tells the others who he or she is and what he or she does.
- **Remember that people learn in different ways** — adults as well as children. Honor different learning styles within the partnership by providing material in many forms, verbal as well as written, and paying attention to the length of meetings so that action-oriented people don't feel frustrated.
- **Use small-group activities to stimulate discussion** between partners and to help parents and other partners develop personal relationships as well as professional interactions. One partnership holds "pre-meetings" before every partnership session, where parents and community members can learn about meeting protocols and staff can encourage parents to raise the issues that

concern them. These meetings give parents a comfortable place to develop leadership skills.

- **Create opportunities for partners to learn about the community.** Many partnerships rotate their meetings among different locations in the community so members can learn about their partners' organizations and clients.
- **Build awareness about collaboration.** Educate partners and the community about the benefits of working together by reaching out to agency administrators, community-based and advocacy organizations, businesses, and religious leaders to explain how comprehensive school-linked strategies work.
- **Make information and ideas accessible to all partners.** Participants frequently leave meetings with varying meanings of what occurred; but partners cannot learn from each other if they do not understand what their collaborators are saying. Effective partnerships teach school and agency partners to avoid technical language and acronyms that may intimidate or confuse other participants. One partnership provides language interpreters at group meetings; the interpreters work with small groups of partners to review and translate documents, so that all participants share the same knowledge base. You may also want to review or "debrief" after meetings. A session to talk about what just happened can help parents and other partners make sure they understand interactions between agency heads or others whose communication styles are different.
- **Build capacity for shared decisionmaking.** Partners may want to adopt a model for group decisionmaking or devise their own approach; either way, all partners must understand and feel comfortable with the process.

A Neutral Meeting Site Can Facilitate Collaboration

An interagency group in Florida initially alternated its monthly meetings between a school and community agency. However, staff from the host agency were interrupted frequently by phone calls and questions. Finally, the group decided to meet at a neutral site: a local community college. This allowed uninterrupted meetings, enabled the group to draw support from the community college, and created the sense of a level playing field among the group members.

Summary

The impetus for forming a collaborative partnership often comes from an individual or a small group of community members seeking answers for a particular problem, or from funding that is available for broad-based change. A core group of planners evolves into a partnership after assessing the context for change and expanding to include additional partners and parents. The governance structure for a collaborative partnership can come from a lead agency, a nonprofit agency created to lead the partnership, or a consortium of agencies.

Partnerships begin planning for action by establishing guidelines for partner relationships, defining a target community, creating trust and shared vision among partners, and building cultural awareness.

Chapter 2

Conducting a Community Assessment

What does a community assessment involve?

How does a partnership conduct a community scan?

How can a community assessment engage families and community members?

What factors are involved in understanding community assets?

How should assessment information be used and by whom?

How can a partnership use assessment results to move from planning to action?

IMAGINE THAT YOU HAVE ALREADY RECOGNIZED THE NEED FOR comprehensive strategies in your community, collected a group of allies, gathered preliminary information to gauge the context for collaboration, formed a partnership, and developed a shared vision. Your partnership is ready to move forward, but you aren't exactly sure how to turn your vision into strategies that make the best use of existing resources and offer the best response to local conditions. You need more information to guide your efforts — and you can find it through a community assessment.

A community assessment is an exercise by which a collaborative partnership gathers information on the current strengths, concerns, and conditions of children, families, and the community. The information comes from many sources — especially parents and family members — and is elicited by many techniques, including interviews, focus groups, and scanning demographic data collected by local agencies. Because many types of partners participate in a community assessment — strategic planners, program staff, administrators, teachers, parents, and other community members — the resulting information is broad, accurate, and useful.

Community assessments focus on local assets, resources, and activities as well as gaps, barriers, or emerging needs. The process of identifying and appraising this information will help your collaborative partnership:

- clearly understand the context in which families live and the issues families want to address;
- locate hidden strengths or underutilized resources that could be developed;

- determine which resources could contribute to comprehensive strategies, and in what way;
- design effective, collaborative strategies that engage children and families because they respond to real and important conditions; and
- empower families and community members by giving them a role in designing and implementing the strategies.

The process of conducting a community assessment involves (**1**) scanning the community to locate existing information, (**2**) developing a family focus, (**3**) identifying community assets and the degree to which they are accessible to the people who can benefit from them, and (**4**) analyzing the information obtained through the first three steps. This chapter outlines each of these stages.

What Does a Community Assessment Involve?

A community assessment is a broad look across agencies, systems, and community members to learn more about the circumstances that a partnership has identified as crucial to its vision. It gathers information from many different individuals and groups in the community; the types of information depend on the partnership's focus and the resources it can draw on to conduct the assessment. Most assessments begin by assembling and comparing information already collected by various individual agencies. But you may also want to collect fresh information from families and community members through interviews, focus groups, and public forums.

Guiding Principles of Community Assessments

A partnership's vision statement should guide the assessment. The vision points you toward the information you need in order to take action; the clearer your vision statement, the more focused and useful your assessment will be. Refer to your vision statement as you make choices about what information to look for and how to interpret what you learn. If your vision statement emphasizes prevention, your assessment will focus on, among other things, young children's health and nutrition.

An assessment should focus on specific information topics such as safety of children or resources for families. Don't try to address all topics at once or you may be overwhelmed by the process and lose sight of what you are trying to accomplish.

Assessment is an ongoing process. Continuing your review of the community's assets and needs over time will help you fine-tune your activities. In this sense, assessment is closely tied to evaluation (see Chapter 4). Ongoing assessment enables your partnership to respond to changing conditions — both those changed by your partnership and those that are beyond your control.

An accurate assessment views the community from multiple perspectives. It recognizes cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and economic diversity as well as special needs. Information from diverse stakeholders including families, community members, and agency staff produces a more complete picture of the community. People's views vary regarding programs, agencies, services, and the relationships between agency staff and community members. People may also have different views on the issues strategies should address.

An effective assessment takes an in-depth look at diversity within a community. Because ethnic groups often differ in their opinions about services, you may want to separate some information by ethnicity. You should also note differences among people who may be ethnically similar but culturally or linguistically different — for example, the many groups of people of Hispanic heritage. There may be differences among first-, second- and third-generation immigrants. And don't forget that people who share racial or ethnic backgrounds may or may not live in similar economic and social circumstances.

An information coordinator can facilitate information gathering by many participants. This role is often filled by a staff member from one of the partner organizations — perhaps the school district or the department of health and human services. The coordinator should have first-hand knowledge of the community and a thorough understanding of the partnership's vision.

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How Does a Partnership Conduct a Community Scan?

The first step in conducting a community scan is to find out what has already been learned through previous assessments. This information can come from agencies inside and outside your partnership and from interviews or surveys of your partners. Begin by reviewing your vision statement: What is its focus? What types of information will indicate assets, resources, and conditions related to that focus?

For example, if your partnership's vision is to increase high school graduation rates, indicators might include rates for school dropout, juvenile incarceration, and adolescent parenting. You can sort these indicators by age, gender, income, and ethnicity to provide a profile of the community.

Once you have chosen which types of information to collect, contact the local, state, and federal entities that already collect various demographic data; some suggested information sources appear in the box on page 32. Many of these sources break down their information by specific groups and by state, county, and sometimes census tract.

Although a community scan should remain focused, don't artificially limit it; if you turn up unexpected information that seems useful, consider broadening your scan (Healthy Start Planning Packet, 1994). You may have touched on an important but hidden issue that will affect your comprehensive strategies. For example, you may not set out to learn about the number of owner occupied homes in the area surrounding the school, but that information may give you insight into the community context.

Involving culturally diverse community members in assessments "can alert the effort to potential political and social taboos and help identify the individuals and organizations with the richest sources of information. . . . By rigorously and creatively assessing community needs, the process gives 'voice' to individuals in the community who have not traditionally been solicited for comment. . . ."

— Chang, De La Rosa Salazar, & Leong (1994)

Useful Indicators for a Community Scan

Health Issues:

- Immunization rates for young children
- Percentage of babies with low birth weight
- Rates of early prenatal care
- Rates of births to single mothers under 18

Economic Conditions:

- Poverty rates
- Number of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches
- Young adults in school or employed
- Housing mobility rates

School Success:

- Measurement of academic achievement in challenging subject matter in grades 4, 8, and 12
- Student mobility rates
- School dropout and grade-retention rates

Family Issues:

- Number of foster care placements
- Number of families on child care waiting lists
- Number of new and reopened Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) cases
- Juvenile incarceration rates

Early Child Development:

- Rates of Head Start and preschool participation
- Percentage of children with special needs
- Rates of adolescent parenting

Sources: Melaville & Blank with Asayesh (1993); Schorr, in Young, Gardner, Coley, Schorr, & Bruner (1994)

Matching (Comparing) Information

Comparisons of information collected from several sources can reveal important trends. For example, school attendance records can be matched to caseload data from health and human service agencies. If confidentiality rules allow, consider comparing lists of students with lists of families that interact with agencies to learn:

- how many students and families in a school attendance area receive services, and of what type;

- how many different agencies are working with children and families;
- which approaches are in greatest demand, and by whom;
- how much overlap exists between programs and agencies; and
- how much and how efficiently money is spent on activities and services for children, youth and families.

This technique is relatively uncomplicated in small communities where agencies do not have thousands of clients. In larger communities, you may want to use a subset as a snapshot of the entire group.

A community scan paints a picture of the conditions in a community and can sharpen a partnership's perceptions of the critical issues that families face. It also can uncover hidden issues. But the community scan provides only one part of the story. To understand how families experience conditions in the community, you will want to focus on gathering information directly from families and the front-line workers with whom they interact.

Sources for Information on Communities

Economic data: Bureau of the Census (301-457-4608), Bureau of Labor Statistics (202-606-7828), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (202-708-1422), and annual reports prepared by cities, counties, and states.

Public health data and vital statistics: State and local departments of health and human services.

Education data: U.S. Department of Education (1-800-USA-LEARN), the National Center for Education Statistics (202-219-1828), and state and local education agencies.

Child welfare and juvenile justice data: U.S. Department of Justice (202-307-0765), local police and human service departments, and state juvenile and criminal justice agencies.

Information on children and youth: Kids Count data books published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (410-547-6600), the Children's Defense Fund (202-628-8787), the National Center for Children in Poverty (212-927-8793), and county and local agencies.

Note that published data change regularly; check publication dates and ask for updates if necessary.

Sources: Bruner et al. (1993); Healthy Start Planning Packet (1994)

How Can a Community Assessment Engage Families and Community Members?

An effective community assessment for comprehensive school-linked strategies should lend insight into the ways families and communities address issues — both formally, through agencies and programs, and informally, through their own strengths or with help from friends, extended family, and neighborhood and church groups. The assessment should also measure the views of individual families and the community as a whole concerning the availability, accessibility, appropriateness, and effectiveness of services and activities.

As you collect this information, remember that assessment should be done **with** children, youth, and families, not **to** them. The degree to which the process is participatory and inclusive will affect the degree to which your strategies reflect community concerns. For example:

- At Everett Middle School in San Francisco, students conducted interviews at community agencies to find out what resources they would be willing to contribute to help the youth at their school. According to a community advocate, this approach elicited a better response than adult interviewers would have received. The students also conducted surveys of their neighborhood. They analyzed the information they collected in math class, and learned to make presentations to program funders.

- Almost 340 community members serve on committees for LINC, a community-based partnership in Kansas City, Missouri. These committees help plan school-linked human service programs, as well as efforts to create jobs, construct low-cost housing, improve access to Medicaid, fight crime, and tackle other community issues. "People are charged up about [LINC]," says one observer. "Community volunteers are looking at the problems [and] coming up with solutions."

Effective methods for gathering family- and community-focused information include focus groups, community forums, interviews and surveys, and action research.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are structured, moderated discussions that bring together small groups of people (usually six to 12) in neutral settings to talk about specific issues. Discussion is a powerful means of learning from families

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and community members about their perceptions, experiences, values, and beliefs. It is also a good way to encourage community involvement.

The following guidelines can help you create a useful focus group:

- Include children, adolescents, parents, agency staff, and community leaders (although not always in the same small focus group).
- Make sure group members reflect the ethnic, linguistic, economic, and cultural diversity of the community. One partnership took a focus group on a walk through the community to gain first-hand knowledge of the community directly through the eyes of the participants.
- Seek input from members of disenfranchised groups — for example, those who are homeless or have relatives in the criminal justice system. These people face many of the issues comprehensive strategies will address, but they rarely have a voice in the community. Participation in a focus group shows these families that their opinions matter, and they will be likely to share useful information. One partnership that created a focus group with families who were homeless, involved in the criminal justice system, or working with child protective services found that these families valued counseling services that other families did not.
- Conduct several sessions on different dates and at different times to ensure broad community participation.
- Don't let the voices of agency staff and community leaders overpower those of parents or children, who may be less talkative in a group setting. Provide signing for community members who are hearing impaired.
- Provide a facilitator or moderator to guide discussion. The moderator should keep conversation flowing and focused but should not dominate the discussion. The moderator should also be sensitive to cultural or linguistic barriers that may inhibit some participants.

Families Bring a Partnership's Vision into Focus

In one urban community, a partnership formed with the intent of making streets safe for children to walk home from school. But when the partnership conducted focus groups, parents said that their priority was finding a safe place to send their children while they were at work. The partnership ultimately shifted its priorities to work with parents on developing after-school child care.

Community Forums

Like focus groups, community forums seek information directly from community members, but forums use large public meetings instead of small-group settings. Although community forums are noisier and harder to moderate than focus groups, they offer an excellent opportunity for families and other community members to raise concerns and become involved in developing strategies. School staff may be especially helpful in planning and conducting community forums because they are aware of families' concerns and cultural preferences.

Community forums work best when they occur at convenient times for working family members and in locations accessible by public transportation; you may also need to provide child care. Some people are uncomfortable presenting their experiences as public testimony, so the moderator should be encouraging and respectful. You may want to split a large forum into smaller subgroups to encourage discussion, and then reconvene the entire group to share common ideas.

In addition, be aware that many community members distrust assessments. "Some communities have been assessed to death and aren't very receptive to . . . data collection efforts because they don't think anything will happen or they are worried the data will be used against them," warns an experienced community advocate. To build trust, it is especially important to give people ample opportunities to voice their concerns and listen to them throughout the assessment process.

Interviews and Surveys

Interviews and surveys help a partnership understand the perspectives (or variety of perspectives), experiences, aspirations, strengths, and values of individual families. Children, youth, family members, and key community or religious leaders can participate in interviews, paper-and-pencil surveys, and other types of self-reporting.

These methods can reveal what community members want, how they view resources, and what

As with other methods of data collection, the participants who respond to interviews and surveys should reflect the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity of the community.

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issues are involved in gaining access to resources or programs. Interviews can also reveal disparities between what people want and what agencies think they need. One partnership found that the agencies had focused on providing mental health counseling and drug prevention education, but families wanted basketball hoops to keep their children off the streets and car repairs so parents could get to work.

Interviews can be conducted in homes, schools and preschools, churches, stores, community centers — any setting in which people are comfortable. Try not to make assumptions that could limit participation by some families, however. A telephone survey will not reach families who don't have telephones; in some neighborhoods, door-to-door interviews are more effective, especially if conducted by local residents. Similarly, people who do not understand written English or cannot read will be unable to respond to a written questionnaire.

Staff from agencies within a partnership may conduct interviews, but family members and community volunteers should also help collect information. These partners can develop their own interviewing skills, inspire other residents to become involved in the partnership, and make the partnership truly collaborative.

Action Research

This approach enables partners to develop research based on action. For example, practitioners may trace a family's ongoing progress through the maze of services and supports in a community, and assess ways a partnership could work with family members. The practitioner-researchers document each of the family's interactions with agencies. The resulting case study shows in great detail how a family finds and uses community resources and opportunities.

Tips for Taking Action:

Sample Questions for Focus Groups, Community Forums, and Interviews

What opportunities and services do families and children want most? Why do families want or need this service or resource?

What opportunities and services do agencies see as most important?

What attracts families to a service or resource?

What barriers keep families from finding or using services and opportunities?

Do any existing services meet families' needs? (For example, health care, child care, job training, public transportation, GED preparation, after-school programs, etc.) If not, why not?

How do families and agencies describe the quality of services available?

What are families' most positive — or negative — encounters with an agency that offers services?

If you (a family or service provider) could change one aspect of a program or service, what would it be and why?

What helps an agency to work effectively with families?

What barriers keep an agency from working effectively with families?

What experience do agencies have in collaborating with other agencies to work with families? What are the benefits of and barriers to working collaboratively?

What activities, policies, and procedures work well at your agency (for families, the agency you use)?

What opportunities exist to develop resources for children and families? What new opportunities should be explored?

What conditions in the community benefit families? What conditions make it more difficult for families to find solutions to their problems?

Source: Adapted from Melaville & Blank with Asayesh (1993)

What Factors Are Involved in Understanding Community Assets?

Before your partnership can design effective comprehensive strategies you must know what assets are available and which are at your disposal. Assets include individuals, associations, and institutions and their strengths and resources. Understanding what these assets are, how they are used and how they could be used, and how families do or do not gain access to these assets will help your partnership choose strategies that fit your community.

The process of identifying assets and accessibility issues is sometimes known as **community mapping** (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Like community scanning, community mapping involves collecting information from existing sources and conducting focus groups, community forums, interviews, and surveys. But while community scanning provides a broad overview of the community, mapping takes inventory of the specific skills, services, and capacities of (1) **people** — including the old, young, poor, non-English-speaking, and homeless; (2) **informal community associations** — including recreational, cultural, religious, athletic, and neighborhood governance groups; and (3) **formal institutions** such as schools, businesses, libraries, hospitals, police and fire departments, and health and human service agencies. For all three groups, community mapping focuses on strengths and abilities as well as needs and services.

Mapping Individual Assets

Information about individual assets accomplishes two goals. It helps a partnership understand human strengths and needs. And — perhaps more importantly — it helps the individual understand how to use his or her own assets to contribute to the community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). As you become informed about the range of individual assets, think about how your partnership's comprehensive strategies can connect assets among individuals and between individuals and community associations or institutions.

Ultimately, families' perceptions and concerns should carry the most weight in program design if school-linked strategies are to be truly responsive.

Information on individual assets should address skills, interests, and experience. Does the individual have experience caring for an elderly, mentally ill, or physically disabled person? If so, what skills has the individual developed? Does the individual have experience and specific

skills in office work, construction and repair, maintenance, food preparation or delivery, child care, transportation, heavy machinery, supervision, sales, the arts, security, or other activities? Which skills are they most comfortable with, which make them employable, and which could they teach to others? What skills would they like to develop? (Questions adapted from Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993.)

Suggested Sources of Information for Community Assessment

Published Resources:

Directories or inventories of agencies: Available at public libraries, cooperative extension offices, mental health centers, juvenile service agencies, and United Way offices.

Surveys of practitioners: Previous survey reports from schools and public health, human service and law enforcement agencies.

Surveys of community-based organizations: Previous survey reports from community action groups, cultural organizations, churches, YMCAs, and YWCAs.

Summary reports: Reports compiled by state departments or special-interest offices that describe programs or services available to a community.

Telephone directories: Lists of community organizations, preschool programs, health providers, and other categories of assets.

Agencies and Organizations:

Federal and state sources: Federal departments of education, labor, housing, and health and human services; block grants and contracts; grants from federal programs such as Title I (Chapter 1), Head Start, and Even Start.

Local government sources: County and municipal governments; local health, education, and human service departments and agencies; agencies that work with families who receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children or participate in the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); local school boards; and city and regional planning agencies.

Nonprofit and service organizations: Medical societies such as the American Academy of Pediatrics; child service and support coalitions; the United Way; the Urban League; the National Council of La Raza; and local community-based, youth- or family-focused organizations.

Sources: Bruner et al. (1993); Healthy Start Planning Packet (1994)

Mapping Associations' Assets

Associations exist for almost every interest group, including the arts, businesses, the elderly, age or gender groups, ethnic groups, neighborhood blocks, schools, civic or service clubs, and political groups. To find out what neighborhood groups exist, what each one does, and how their members participate, Kretzmann and McKnight suggest the following steps:

- Visit parks, churches, and other community institutions and ask the community members you find there to identify all the associations they know about.
- Share the list with associations and their members to make sure it is complete and diverse.
- Consult newspapers and published directories.
- Survey a sample of residents by telephone.
- Contact local churches to find out what groups they sponsor or provide with meeting space.

"Associations, together with the capacities of individuals, are the basic community-building tools of local neighborhoods. . . . [A]n effective process of regenerating local communities requires an organization that identifies and involves as many of these associations as possible in creating and implementing a vision for the local community."

Kretzmann & McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out* (1993)

Mapping Institutions' Assets

In addition to identifying the institutions that exist in the community, remember that institutions often provide a range of assets to families and communities — and to collaborative partnerships. For example, a school's assets (in addition to education opportunities) may include facilities for meetings, materials and equipment, purchasing power, employment, adult education, access to teachers and student interns, and financial capacity. Think of each institution as a collection of assets that can help your partnership in building comprehensive strategies (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

Access Issues

A family's ability to contribute to (and benefit from) community assets is influenced by the degree to which families have access to those assets. For example, family members who do not speak English or cannot read may not know how to contribute skills to a community association or program. Families who don't own cars or can't afford car insurance may be unable to use capacity-building services offered by a community

institution, especially if the institution is not located near affordable public transportation. Low-income families may not be able to participate in activities that require a financial investment — either for the activity itself or to pay for child care while a parent participates. Families with members who have physical disabilities may not be able to use services provided in a facility without access for the disabled.

As you map your community's assets, compare the location of resources and services to the location of the children and families your partnership is trying to reach. Draw a diagram of assets, resources, and services that shows gaps and areas of overlap (for examples, see Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Or, use a large map and colored push-pins, or commercial geographic mapping and database software. A partner from the business community may be able to help.

How Should Assessment Information Be Used and by Whom?

A good community assessment produces a wealth of useful information, and it's natural to feel confused about the best way to sort through it. Don't panic; remind yourself of a few key principles:

- Community assessments are guided by vision statements. Reviewing the principles and goals expressed in your vision statement will help your partnership keep on track.
- Comprehensive strategies should be family-focused. You can prioritize and differentiate the information you have collected by starting with information gathered from families.
- Collaborative partnerships and comprehensive strategies should respond to multiple perspectives. Comparing information on the same assets and issues collected from various sources will help you see patterns, trends, and disparities.

Comparing information gathered in different ways provides insights and information beyond what can be learned from a single method of data collection.

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In addition, the following questions can help your partnership analyze and interpret information from a community assessment:

To what extent do assets of individuals and agencies in the community match the interests, concerns and needs of children and families? Compare families' statements about assets available to them and their unmet needs or interests to information on community resources. The comparison may show gaps, patterns, and duplication among assets and services. Based on this analysis, your partnership may decide to modify its comprehensive vision or change its priorities.

Are the resources and services available to families appropriate and of acceptable quality? Compare families' perceptions of appropriateness and quality to those of community associations, institutions, and service providers. Your partnership may conclude that comprehensive strategies should aim to change resources and services to better fit families' ideas about appropriateness and quality. It may not be enough to simply add services and supports; it's important to review the quality and appropriateness of practices and compare them with successful programs designed to address similar issues.

Are services, resources, and programs accessible to families and children? Review the information you collected during community mapping. Are there obvious or hidden barriers — costs, inconvenient locations, differences in cultures or languages — that keep families from contributing to or using community assets? If so, what actions did families, associations, and institutions recommend to remove the barriers? How can these actions fit into comprehensive strategies that use existing and potential assets?

Quality First

Low school attendance was a persistent problem in one neighborhood. The school solicited opinions from children, parents, and service providers about why attendance was so poor. Service providers said that low school attendance was a symptom of the many problems facing families. However, parents said they were reluctant to send their children to a school they believed offered an inappropriate program. Once the school recognized that quality concerns were the problem, it could begin to bring families and service providers together to seek a comprehensive solution.

Are the assets of families, informal associations, and community institutions being used to the best advantage of children and families? Again, look at the match between the location and use of community assets and the interests and needs of families. How could comprehensive strategies improve the use of existing resources, make better use of potential resources, develop hidden assets, and attract resources from outside the community?

What do families and community groups want to see happen? The interviews, surveys, focus groups, and community forums your partnership conducted should indicate what families want in order to improve their conditions. This information will also indicate the kinds of outcomes families and community groups want from comprehensive school-linked strategies. Your partnership can use this information to set priorities and to guide an evaluation of your strategies (see Chapter 4).

How does your partnership's vision compare with the information collected by the community assessment? The assessment gives a partnership a new lens through which to view its original vision. Based on the assessment, you may want to revise or refocus the vision.

How Can a Partnership Use Assessment Results to Move from Planning to Action?

The process of analyzing assessment information precedes action, because it requires a partnership to:

- **provide a clear picture of how the community currently operates** — how families, agencies, and institutions relate and interact;
- **define how the new strategies will differ from existing systems** — how more comprehensive connections can be developed between families, agencies, and community institutions; and
- **identify strengths and untapped assets of a community** and ways to mobilize them.

Developing an action plan involves creating goals that respond to a shared vision and to the issues identified by the community assessment, and planning ways to meet those goals that form comprehensive strategies — strategies that include a range of partners and offer an array of opportunities.

To provide comprehensive school-linked strategies that respond to the interests, strengths, and needs of children and families, an action plan must involve:

- developing the knowledge and skills families and practitioners need to contribute to a collaborative partnership;
- mobilizing existing resources — human, in-kind, and financial — and developing new resources;
- conducting ongoing evaluations of the partnership's success in meeting its goals and maintaining its commitment to families, children, and the community; and
- sustaining a healthy collaborative effort.

The action plan should specify what the comprehensive partnership will accomplish in each of these areas. The remaining chapters of this guidebook explore these topics in greater depth.

Learning Opportunities

Partners learn a great deal by participating in a community assessment and by interpreting the information it collects. Try to involve all of your partners and other community members in every phase of assessment — planning the scan, conducting interviews in neighborhoods and by telephone, conducting and participating in focus groups and community forums; and mapping community assets.

When you are collecting assessment information, remember that a small-group approach helps families feel comfortable sharing their concerns. For example, your partnership might learn from community interviews by dividing into small groups to consider different points of view expressed in an interview or survey. Small-group discussions might give voice to disenfranchised groups and reveal why different community members hold different opinions about strategies such as locating family resource centers at schools. This knowledge will deepen stakeholders' understanding of one another as well as your partnership's understanding of its community.

Summary

A community assessment enables collaborative partners to gather information about the strengths, concerns, and conditions of children, families, and the community. A thorough assessment involves scanning existing information about the community, developing a family focus, identifying community assets and their accessibility, and analyzing information. Assessments should view the community from multiple perspectives and recognize cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and economic diversity.

Techniques for gathering assessment information include focus groups, community forums, interviews and surveys, and action research. Partners can also create a community map to identify assets and accessibility issues.

Chapter 3

Finding and Developing Resources

How can partners find and develop financial resources for school-linked comprehensive strategies?

How can partnerships use financial resources effectively?

How can partnerships use human resources effectively?

How can a variety of resources be brought together to create "seamless" strategies?

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL-LINKED PARTNERSHIPS FACE A CHALLENGE in finding and developing stable resources to support and sustain their efforts. "Resources" in this guidebook refer to funding, in-kind contributions, and human resources such as program staff, parents, and community members.

Funding from any single source is usually too unpredictable and insufficient to sustain long-term, capacity-building strategies. As a result, comprehensive partnerships often combine multiple funding sources and human resources to meet the priorities of families and children in their community. The Family Center described below (a composite of several actual programs) illustrates the variety and complexity of resources that together create balanced and comprehensive strategies.

The Family Center is located in several rooms of a community center next door to an elementary school. The center draws resources from many partners:

- The **city** contributes space, custodial services, and utilities for the center.
- The **school district** uses five percent of the funds it receives from the U.S. Department of Education (under Title XI of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) for school-linked comprehensive services; this supports the center coordinator's and bilingual receptionist's salaries as well as learning activities for staff and parents.
- The **county** Department of Public Health has assigned a public health nurse to work with families at the center and in the

community as well as to provide immunizations and health screening for preschool and school-aged children. The nurse also meets with school staff to talk about community health issues and concerns.

- Two **community-based organizations** pay the salaries of the two family advocates on the center's staff. The local **United Way** provides funding for a mental health worker who spends two days a week at the center working with children and their families.
- Groups of **parents** meet at the center or in homes to provide peer support or to help each other learn English. Parents have also formed a clothing exchange. Some parents began working as volunteers and now are employed as paraprofessionals through an employability development program.
- A local **bank** has donated furniture for the reception area and offices; a local **corporation** donated the center's computer system and technical support to maintain it. Local **service organizations** contribute clothing and a small supply of cash so staff can help families with emergency needs.
- A **neighborhood church** prints the center's newsletter and provides facilities and child care for parent meetings. The church also maintains a pantry of emergency food and supplies open to families from the community.

How Can Partners Find and Develop Financial Resources for School-linked Comprehensive Strategies?

Because comprehensive strategies include activities that schools do not typically fund, collaborative partners must look beyond traditional school funding sources to find and develop financial support. Such support can come in the form of cash grants, commitment of staff time, or in-kind donations of facilities, equipment, supplies, and services. Potential sources include partner agencies; local, state, and federal government programs; private organizations; and businesses, corporations, and foundations. In most successful comprehensive school-linked partnerships, all members — individuals as well as agencies — contribute resources according to their

In most successful comprehensive school-linked partnerships, all members contribute resources according to their ability to participate, and no partner can dominate the effort simply by contributing more than others.

ability to participate, and no partner can dominate the effort simply by contributing more than others.

During the planning process for the school-linked strategies, your partnership should examine all possibilities for financial support, including in-kind contributions from all partner agencies (see Chapter 2). It is often easier for an organization to provide the services of a staff member or to loan equipment than to contribute cash from its operating budget.

Successful programs cast a wide net to involve as many individuals and groups as possible in providing resources. Multisource funding raises several important issues that can affect your collaborative partnership:

- Many grants require matching contributions from other sources. Your partnership may need to directly link two or more funding sources in order to satisfy a single funder.
- The partnership usually is accountable separately to each funder for expenditures and outcomes specified by the donation or grant. Maintaining accountability to multiple donors will require a partnership to spend considerable time and effort on financial, statistical, and narrative reports for funders, who often have different funding and reporting cycles.
- Partnerships often need to reapply for funding and support regularly — sometimes every year, for every grant — searching for new funding sources when grants and donations run out. Again, this can be very time consuming. Partners should prepare and regularly update financial information, emphasizing outcomes, accomplishments, and cost-effectiveness.
- Federal and state governments have traditionally funded programs to meet specific needs, such as immunizations, or serve categories of people. Local partnerships have worked to combine these categorical funding streams to support more comprehensive, holistic approaches. Recently enacted legislation at the federal level and in many states gives partnerships the ability to use funding to develop comprehensive plans for children and families. Specific federal program examples are listed on the following page.

Federal Sources for School-linked Services

Title XI of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1994 allows local school districts the flexibility to reallocate up to five percent of the funds they receive under ESEA to programs of comprehensive school-linked services. Districts must submit a separate application to use ESEA funds in this way. For additional information, contact the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education (202-401-0113).

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides children in targeted assistance schools a portion of Title I funds if other public and private sources do not meet a variety of needs including basic medical equipment; eyeglasses and hearing aids; compensation for a school-linked services coordinator; development and training for parents in identifying and meeting the comprehensive needs of their children; and professional development for teachers, pupil services personnel, and other staff. For additional information, contact your state or local Title I coordinator.

The Federal Family Preservation and Family Support Program allocates funds to states for developing local plans to strengthen families and reduce the number of children who are placed outside their homes. Although Family Preservation and Support funds are administered differently in each state, many states emphasize developing family resource centers, including programs that are school-based or school-linked. For additional information, contact your state Department of Social Services or, in many states, the Commission on Children and Families.

Head Start State Collaboration Project Grants help build early childhood systems and access to comprehensive services and supports for low-income children in each state. For additional information, contact your state Head Start office.

Even Start provides federal "glue money" for local collaborative efforts to improve family literacy through early childhood education, parenting education, adult basic education, and parent-child interactions. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994 contains provisions that suggest collaboration between Even Start, Head Start, and Title I efforts. For more information, contact the U.S. Department of Education (202-260-0991).

How Can Partnerships Use Financial Resources Effectively?

While some types of funding may be relatively stable over several years, most public agencies undergo yearly changes in funding. Experienced program leaders say that "hard" money — funds that can be relied on every year — has virtually disappeared in today's funding economy. This situation makes it imperative that partnerships use funds effectively.

Short-term funding is best used for onetime expenditures, such as building a play area for small children, developing an emergency fund for families, or providing professional development for staff.

Most partnerships attract a mixture of short-term and long-term resources, and these should be used for different purposes. Short-term "special" funding from grants, gifts, and corporate contributions cannot be expected to support core program expenses — salaries, utilities, and facilities. This type of funding is best used for onetime expenditures, such as equipping a play area for small children, developing an emergency fund for families, or providing professional development for staff. Program operators and financial contributors sometimes overestimate the pace of change; try not to promise major changes with short-term funding.

If your partnership can demonstrate that it uses limited funds efficiently and productively, you may be able to encourage funders to increase their financial contributions or supplement them by contributing staff time or other resources. One approach is to bring potential funders into the partnership. Many private-sector organizations — local United Ways, chambers of commerce, and corporate philanthropies — contribute actively and creatively when they are "at the table" of the collaborative partnership, involved in planning and setting its goals. Through direct participation, these groups also become knowledgeable about the comprehensive effort and the kinds of resources it needs. Most are more inclined to support a partnership if they are regarded as sources of time, talent, and energy rather than only as sources of financial support.

Successful partnerships depend on individuals of all types: **parents** who contribute their understanding of conditions in the community as well as skills in leadership, organization, communication, and mechanical or technical matters; **program staff** who take on new roles and responsibilities in school-linked programs; **agency representatives and coordinators** who manage assets and resources creatively; and **partnership leaders** who advocate for changing organizations' cultures to better serve children, families, and communities.

Key to a partnership's success is its ability to (**1**) build a core of committed staff, (**2**) ensure that staff work well with each other to support families and children, (**3**) recognize and use informal community resources, especially those that families can provide, and (**4**) support and sustain staff, volunteers, and interns in their work with children and families.

Developing a Core Staff

Every successful school-linked effort relies on staff who support the goals and philosophy of the partnership and can translate that support into sustained action. A balanced staff that reflects the diversity of the community is essential. But it isn't always easy to develop an effective staff — partly because of the very nature of comprehensive strategies. Diverse, inclusive partnerships bring together individuals from vastly different organizations and cultures and ask them to take on new roles in a new environment. Successful partnerships use the following approaches to ease this process:

- Recruit staff to fill positions voluntarily, rather than assigning people to programs.
- Consider the assets of all partners when selecting a core staff, and encourage staff members to recognize each other's assets.
- Think creatively about ways staff can expand beyond traditional roles. For example, front-line practitioners who see the same families over a period of time can learn to set short-term and longer-term goals, instead of focusing on "treating" each episode that brings the family to the program. By doing this, staff begin to think of themselves as agents of change who can help empower families.

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Tips for Taking Action: Hiring Appropriate Staff

Look for individuals who:

- reside in the community and have experience working with parents, community residents, and organizations;
- have worked in more than one agency (and therefore have a broader perspective on the conditions of families and children);
- can adapt to new situations and work to eliminate barriers to success;
- have a track record of being accountable for their actions and results of their work;
- have a sense of humor and the ability to place events in the context of the larger effort; and
- are familiar with the languages and cultures of the community.

Ensuring Staff Teamwork

In order to work well with children and families, staff must first work well with each other. A sense of inclusiveness among school and agency staff is essential, especially if they are working together on school campuses. Many partner organizations have strong cultures — systems of beliefs and practices — that include special staff roles, schedules, and communication styles. School staff may be unable to participate in partnership activities scheduled during school holidays or summer sessions; teachers' union rules may also dictate some limits on roles for school staff. Community-based organizations and nonprofit groups also have distinct cultures, and some may prefer to conduct only activities they have been successful with in the past.

Some comprehensive partnerships create broad-based teams to guide staffing decisions. For example, a family education center near Chicago established a 24-member team of teachers, parents, agency and community representatives, and health care practitioners to interview potential principals. The team created a job description, listed characteristics of the ideal candidate, compiled interview questions, and agreed on a decisionmaking process. Each team member participated in interviewing each job candidate and made recommendations on hiring.

Recognizing and Using Informal Community Resources

Remember that all partners, including — and especially — parents, have something to give to comprehensive strategies. By locating and asking for informal contributions from unexpected sources, your partnership will have opportunities to expand its base in the community.

For example, one school-linked partnership promotes a philosophy of exchanging resources. When parents use services, they indicate

what they can contribute in return; this may be time spent tutoring another child, or painting a wall. This approach builds self-esteem among participants and enables the partnership to capitalize on all of the community's assets.

Supporting and Sustaining Volunteer Staff and Trainees

Volunteers, interns, and trainees can provide valuable support to program staff and, when they come from the community, can broaden community support for comprehensive strategies. Many school-linked partnerships use community volunteers: high school students involved in "learning by doing" programs, parents, members of the religious community, retired residents, and other interested individuals. Your partnership also may be able to collaborate with local universities to provide valuable training opportunities for students in the health, counseling, education, and social work fields.

Volunteers, interns, and trainees can provide valuable support to program staff and broaden community involvement in the program.

Such experiences benefit both the partnership and the participants. Student interns and trainees gain experience and first-hand knowledge that cannot be duplicated in the classroom. Volunteers get a chance to use their skills in a way that benefits their community; they often become champions of the partnerships and attract additional community support.

Experienced school-linked programs offer the following advice for supporting and sustaining volunteer staff and trainees:

- Individuals receiving training need close attention from program staff, with time to discuss and interpret their experiences and to develop professional attitudes and skills.
- Designating one member of the partnership's staff as a volunteer coordinator can facilitate the recruitment, training, assignment, and ongoing support of volunteer partners. Check partner agencies' policies on involving volunteers; some agencies require fingerprinting, tuberculosis testing, and other screening procedures before they permit volunteers to work with children.
- Acknowledge the importance of volunteers through letters and certificates of appreciation, public recognition, and opportunities for professional development.
- Whenever possible, hire good volunteers as paid staff. One important function of comprehensive strategies can be to create new work opportunities for community members.

Successful comprehensive school-linked partnerships have found that a basic, shared understanding about how resources will be managed can smooth the flow of operations considerably. For example:

Agree that every partner agency will contribute resources. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the programs that are the most successful are those in which all partners commit resources, whether in the form of financial support, staff resources, or in-kind services and supplies. This commitment is made with the understanding that partner agencies are only asked to contribute within their capacity and that every contribution is important.

Designate a fiscal agent. It is preferable to have one organization manage and organize resources for the partnership. This fiscal agent may be one of the partner organizations, such as the school or school district; an existing nonprofit, such as the United Way or another community-based organization; or a new community organization established for this purpose.

Seek out resources to support the partnership's action plan. Partnerships are sometimes tempted to apply for all available funding, an approach which may actually pull them off track. To avoid the trap of searching indiscriminately for available grants, your partnership should develop an action plan that spells out staffing and funding needs, and then look for resources to support that plan. Equipped with a sound plan, partnerships can promote their vision to potential funders and define the kinds of support they need.

Develop a single line-item budget that shows all of the partnership's resources and a timeline for funding. Managing multiple funding sources is much easier with a budget that includes the many sources of income. A timeline for funding will help partners monitor short-term funding sources and changes in funding.

Match resources, goals, and needs carefully. To ensure stable funding for the comprehensive strategies and uninterrupted programs for families, your partnership must use resources as effectively as possible. For example, it is not wise to cover core services with short-term funding. Similarly, you may be tempted to hire several new staff when funds become available, but if the same money will not be available next year, a better option might be to use it, for example, to increase the hours of

existing staff, to improve program infrastructure, or to provide more learning opportunities.

Learning Opportunities

Learning about community resources involves deepening the understanding of all partners and building trust so they will share knowledge that often is not public. For example, the partnership may want to know:

> What is the school's budget? Are there resources that can be reallocated to support the comprehensive initiative?
>
> How is state and federal family support and prevention funding allocated in the community? How can this funding become a resource in these comprehensive strategies?
>
> How can parents bring resources — their skills, knowledge, and time as well as material goods — to the table?

Partners often learn about resources by holding small meetings to gather information, which they then share with the entire partnership to create a complete picture of available resources. Try to involve a variety of stakeholders in each meeting so you build a shared knowledge base among partners.

Learning Opportunities for Staff

The new roles, responsibilities, and relationships required by comprehensive strategies make learning opportunities for front-line staff especially important. These opportunities also provide a forum for communication between service systems. Supervisors and staff at a comprehensive program in Hillsborough County, Florida suggest the following approaches:

- Focus on teaching people how to work together. Most groups and individuals initially overestimate how easy it will be to work with others and understand their perspectives.
- Devote some time to establishing credibility. Community leaders must trust partnership organizers; residents must trust service providers and institutions; and practitioners and agencies must respect community members.

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- Hold "reality checks" frequently to make sure everyone understands what is being discussed. The same words can mean very different things to different groups; don't assume everyone is talking about the same thing.
- Consider creating teams of parents, school personnel, and child welfare representatives to visit schools to familiarize teachers with comprehensive strategies.
- Tailor the topics of your learning opportunities to local needs. Common topics include methods for establishing advisory groups; mobilizing neighborhoods; developing multidisciplinary staff teams; building leadership, communication, and writing skills so partners can communicate across disciplines; and developing contractual agreements, cooperative resolutions, and interagency agreements.

Summary

Building support for comprehensive school-linked strategies requires pooling resources from many sources and using them flexibly to address the conditions of children and families in new, holistic ways. When funding comes from a variety of sources, traditional program boundaries blur. The approaches outlined in this chapter help partnerships develop and weave together human and financial resources to support comprehensive strategies.

Chapter 4

Evaluating School-linked Strategies

Why evaluate school-linked strategies?

How can school staff and their partners participate in evaluation efforts?

What are the steps in evaluating school-linked strategies?

THE WORD "EVALUATION" CAN FILL PRACTITIONERS WITH DREAD if they have lived through the experience of having an outside evaluator descend on a school or program, collect a batch of data, and declare that the school or program is inadequate. But evaluation does not need to be a complicated or negative task. In fact, many people discover that their personal experiences in comprehensive strategies help them contribute to a realistic and thorough evaluation. They also realize that the evaluation process sharpens their awareness of a program's strengths and weaknesses and helps them think creatively about new linkages that could benefit children and families.

This guidebook views evaluation as:

- an activity that is done **by** and **with** families and other collaborative partners — not **to** them;
- a continuous process of gathering information about a program or strategies to periodically assess its progress toward shared goals — a tool for measuring how strategies are working and whether they are achieving desired results;
- a means of improving accountability to partners, children, families, communities, and funders; and
- a method for using information to modify and improve activities, strategies, and goals.

For materials that provide more in-depth discussion of the evaluation process, refer to the Suggested Resources section of this guidebook (Appendix B).

Why Evaluate School-linked Strategies?

An evaluation tells partners whether their activities are achieving the results they want — not just at the end of an activity but also in the short term and during an intermediate period. Collaborative partners can use the evaluation process and the information it provides to:

- **Build ownership of the comprehensive strategies among stakeholders.** Partners and participants who are involved in evaluating comprehensive strategies become even more invested in their success. For example, the federal Even Start program encourages local partnerships to engage current and potential collaborators and policymakers in the evaluation process. These evaluations often attract community support and financial resources for the partnership.
- **Guide program improvement.** Evaluations enable programs to periodically reflect on their goals and measure their progress in achieving them. By comparing the activities that were envisioned to those that actually occurred — and by assessing the success of the activities that were implemented — a partnership may decide to refine or alter its programs or services.
- **Build accountability.** School-linked strategies require a major investment of resources and energy. Funders, policymakers, and other stakeholders want evidence their investments are producing better outcomes for children, youth, and families. Evaluation results can account for how resources were used and document program effectiveness to justify the costs of the effort. By showing that they are accountable for their investments, partnerships also show that they are responsive to the concerns of their supporters.
- **Test innovative ideas.** Because school-linked strategies often try new approaches — for example, building skills rather than simply treating problems — they must have some means of assessing which approaches work, and why. Clear feedback enables partnerships to build on the best ideas and discard ones that do not work.

Evaluation should be incorporated early into the design of your strategies and used continuously throughout their implementation so partners can use information to improve their efforts. "An evaluation should be a smoke detector, not an autopsy," Susan Philliber, a program evaluator, says.

- **Support school reform and improve service systems.** School-linked strategies strengthen reforms in schools and in human service delivery systems. Evaluations enable partners within these systems to pinpoint how each program enhances reform and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of connections among schools and agencies. This information helps partnerships align and coordinate multiple systems and partners.
- **Ensure strong communication and organization.** Evaluations help clarify communication patterns and roles among individual partners and agencies. This feedback enables programs within a comprehensive effort to improve their communication — and thus their overall effectiveness. Partnerships can also use evaluation results in organizing and structuring their activities to refine cross-agency strategies. For example, when the Savannah New Futures collaborative learned about the early failure of elementary school students, it moved to expand its focus to include school readiness activities (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1995).
- **Document the need for policy changes.** Evaluation results that accurately portray the experiences of children and families participating in a program can help partnerships develop recommendations concerning policies and practices (Nissani & Nelson, 1995).

Tips for Taking Action: Preliminary Questions for Evaluators

What do we want to learn about the comprehensive school-linked strategies?

What will be different for children and families when the strategies are implemented?

What will be different for teachers, health and human services providers, and other front-line practitioners when the strategies are implemented?

How will we know the school-linked strategies are operating effectively?

How Can School Staff and Their Partners Participate in Evaluation Efforts?

In the past, some evaluations involved school or program staff only in a limited way — perhaps by assigning them the task of collecting specific data (Shaw & Replogle, 1995). This approach does not take advantage of all

partners' potential to enrich evaluation (Gomby & Larson, 1992). School staff and their partners must be involved in evaluation efforts; otherwise, these key stakeholders may feel that they — not their program — are being evaluated, and that the evaluation is an ordeal imposed on them by an outside authority (Shaw & Replogle, 1995). When all partners work together to identify the purpose of an evaluation, design measurements, and interpret findings, they all learn how school-linked strategies make a difference in the community and they all develop a sense of ownership.

Tips for Taking Action: Roles for Partners in an Evaluation

School staff and their partners can:

- identify the assumptions about how people and conditions change that guide the comprehensive strategies;
- connect the evaluation to these assumptions;
- determine the purpose of the evaluation;
- design tools and measures for gathering useful information;
- share expertise and knowledge about children and families;
- offer insights about how comprehensive strategies are working and how their effectiveness can be measured; and
- suggest ways to modify and improve programs and strategies, based on evaluation information.

What Are the Steps in Evaluating School-linked Strategies?

A useful evaluation of school-linked strategies involves:

(1) **identifying the purpose of the evaluation,** the information needs of stakeholders, and the assumptions about change that guide practitioners and programs;
(2) **identifying the short-term, intermediate, and long-term indicators of progress** and results that will produce useful information;
(3) **selecting techniques for gathering information;**
(4) **developing a system for maintaining records** and other information; and
(5) **developing a feedback loop for using evaluation information** to improve school-linked strategies.

A description of these steps follows.

Identify the Purpose of Evaluation, the Information Needs of Stakeholders, and the Partnership's Assumptions about Change

Start by thinking about the goals that your partnership chose to guide its efforts. What were your goals, and what assumptions did you make about the best way to bring about change? What strategies did your goals encourage you to adopt? How do the strategies connect to the desired results expressed in your goals? The answers to these questions will suggest types of information you can collect that will help you evaluate your partnership's success.

Next, think about the information needs of each stakeholder. **Parents and families** need to learn what comprehensive strategies offer them and how they can contribute to the community. **School leaders** need to learn how comprehensive strategies fit into the broader picture of educational improvement and student achievement. What links exist between the comprehensive strategies and school reform goals and approaches? What changes have occurred that might influence school policies? **Health care providers** want to know if the comprehensive strategies are improving access to health care for children and families. How many children are receiving health services, and of what type? What patterns of service use have been identified? In

"Agreement on a common set of goals and outcome measures not only makes collaboration easier, but also helps promote a community-wide 'culture of responsibility' for children and families, and fuels the momentum for change."

— Lisbeth Schorr in *Making a difference: Moving to outcome-based accountability for comprehensive service reforms,* (1994)

response, how has the partnership modified its approach? **Community organizations** want to know what impact the strategies are having on community capacity-building and revitalization.

Each of these information needs will suggest different types of evaluation approaches. Your evaluation may not be able to satisfy every information need, but you will want to respond to the needs of as many stakeholders as possible.

Finally, clarify the goals and expected results of your evaluation. Again, this process will help determine the information you will need to collect. The purpose of evaluation should be determined by drawing on the insights of diverse stakeholders.

2 Identify Useful Indicators of Progress and Results that Meet Information Needs

A good evaluation doesn't wait until a program is "finished" and then try to measure final results; instead, it is an ongoing process that measures change at many stages. You will want to choose indicators that measure:

- short-term accomplishments;
- interim or intermediate progress; and
- long-term results.

Short-term indicators measure what actually happened within the comprehensive effort: whether resources were generated, staff were hired, programs were implemented, and services were provided. **Interim indicators** measure what happened as a result of the strategies — for example, parents read to their children more frequently (an interim result) because they attended a school-sponsored parenting class (a short-term result). **Long-term results** measure the changes linked to interim results — for example, whether a child's reading ability improved because his or her parent read aloud at home. Evaluations also reveal the relationships between these different types of indicators.

Be aware that some conditions, such as high mobility of families, can make it hard to measure some indicators of progress. Be creative and selective as you choose indicators and methods of measuring change.

3 Select Techniques for Gathering Information

The approaches your partnership uses to collect information and to document and measure progress will depend on the purpose and design of your evaluation. A discussion of key issues follows.

What information will be most meaningful? Traditional evaluations collect quantitative and qualitative information. **Quantitative**

information includes numerical measures, trends, and statistics. This type of information comes from attendance records, intake and eligibility forms, census reports, or state data sources. Evaluators also create questionnaires or surveys to produce their own quantitative information.

Qualitative information is more descriptive and subjective than quantitative data. Common sources are interviews, observations, and focus groups with staff and program participants. Evaluation teams often turn to qualitative data to explain trends they have found in quantitative information. For example, if records show that a new counseling center is being underutilized, interviews with families and staff may reveal why.

Both types of data are essential to evaluation because they can be used to explain and interpret each other. By using both, your partnership will build consistency and be able to assess your progress accurately. Again, different kinds of information will be meaningful to different stakeholders, A school principal may be impressed by information that more parents are reading to their children; a parent, however, might be more interested in the fact that more children feel safe walking to and from school than in knowing that the majority of parents gave high ratings to a literacy class. And some information will be meaningful to the whole partnership — especially if it can be used for continuous improvement.

Using a variety of techniques to gather several types of information will give your partnership insight into many community perspectives. For example, interviewing people to collect stories about community history not only yields useful knowledge, it provides information that is more meaningful to many community members than statistical measurements. Collecting stories also helps involve families, teachers, and other front-line stakeholders in the evaluation process. Their stories give insights into the paths families follow as they participate in comprehensive strategies and help partners better understand the connection between expected program results and the realities of families' experiences.

Which methods will capture the information you need? Many of the methods for gathering information described in Chapter 3 (Community Assessment) are also used for evaluation. These include:

- structured interviews with children, school staff, and other collaborative partners;
- surveys and questionnaires of participants;
- documentation of families' stories;
- focus groups;
- self-reporting and feedback forms completed by school staff and their partners;

- review and analysis of existing sources such as school and agency records and demographic profiles of the community; and
- observation of participants.

Consider how the methods you choose will be received by families, staff, partners, and the community. Will they be meaningful to them? Again, make sure that the language used in forms or interviews will be understandable, culturally appropriate, and respectful and that providing or collecting the information will not place undue burdens on families, school staff, or service providers. How will all stakeholders use the evaluation findings in a way that clearly supports and benefits the community?

Many school-linked partnerships are moving away from evaluations based on purely quantitative models and experimental designs (see Shaw & Replogle, 1995; Wagner et al., 1994). Instead, these partnerships document how programs operate, how families experience the programs, and what short- and long-term benefits result from the programs. **Short-term and interim results** indicate whether progress is being made toward the long-term goals. **Long-term results** indicate whether children and families have benefited from the comprehensive strategies in the ways specified by the partnership's goals — that is, whether the participants' lives or community conditions have changed as planned. If your partnership's efforts do not produce the short-term results you sought, study the information you collected to find out which factors may be inhibiting progress. Adjust your strategies and continue to assess short-term results to make sure your efforts are on track.

Linking Measurements and Results

In order to measure progress and accomplishments, you must clearly understand your partnership's goals and assumptions about change. For example, a partnership with the goal of improving academic performance may assume that an increase in student attendance will lead to improved academic performance — and that a school-based health clinic may help increase student attendance by treating the illnesses that keep children out of school. What short-term outcomes will indicate that the strategies are on track?

One indicator may be a reduction in absences caused by illness. If school attendance increases in the short term, the partnership might expect a long-term result of improved school performance. On the other hand, if school attendance does not increase in the short term, partners would not anticipate that school performance would improve.

4 Develop a System for Gathering Information and Maintaining Records

Evaluations require time, human and financial resources, and a structure that supports information gathering and record keeping. Without a system for collecting and managing information, evaluation responsibilities may eat into the schedules of school and agency staff and detract from the quality or quantity of their activities. A good evaluation neither overburdens teachers, service providers, and program participants with paperwork nor produces so little data that there is nothing to analyze.

Many schools and agencies have record-keeping systems in place that can be modified or revised for an evaluation of comprehensive strategies. Successful evaluations use the following guidelines to design or revise record-keeping systems:

Simplify information collection methods. School and agency staff are much more likely to complete a half-page checklist than a five-page, handwritten reporting form. If the technology is available, you can save time by having staff type information directly into the computer system instead of using written forms.

Create flexible procedures. In communities with low literacy rates, many parents who participate in comprehensive strategies may need to enter data verbally into a tape recorder rather than writing reports.

Build a two-way flow of communication. When the partners who collect information have easy, frequent access to the individuals or groups analyzing it, a feedback loop is created that informs all stakeholders.

Ensure confidentiality. It isn't easy to create a two-way flow of data and at the same time respect the confidentiality of participants. Make sure your partnership develops effective methods for maintaining confidentiality when it plans an evaluation.

Document the stories of some families. School and agency staff can provide valuable information by describing the path that some families follow as they work with a program and progress toward their goals. This information puts a human face on facts. Ask staff to explain the referrals they make and comment on families' conditions and concerns.

Review and refine record-keeping efforts. Few information systems are perfect. Sometimes programs have to gather data from past records or reconstruct a record of services; other record-keeping systems capture inadequate information or fail to produce the information needed for evaluation. These imperfections can be worked out over time if partners continually assess the changes and identify what works well in the system — and what needs to work better.

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Develop a Feedback Loop for Using Evaluation Information to Improve School-linked Strategies

As evaluation results become available, your partnership can set up a system for sharing and discussing the information so that all partners understand how programs and services relate to goals and visions. A feedback loop also enables partners to use information to make informed decisions.

Share the findings with all partners; they need to hear how their participation has made a difference for children and families. In particular, ask school and agency staff to read your evaluation findings and prepare recommendations based on their insights. Their first-hand experience can help them identify changes in practice that directly address any issues that have surfaced. Set aside time at partnership meetings to discuss evaluation findings and brainstorm improvements. And disseminate evaluation findings to the larger community to build support for school-linked strategies and increase awareness about community conditions.

Learning Opportunities

When partners help evaluate school-linked strategies, the evaluation process itself becomes a learning experience. To "demystify" evaluation, make sure that:

- any person from outside the partnership who serves as an evaluator is comfortable working and talking with parents and community members;
- all members of the partnership have an opportunity to discuss what they want to learn from the evaluation and to understand how the data they are collecting will generate the information they want;
- partners have an opportunity to discuss evaluation findings with the person who coordinated the evaluation, so they understand what the findings mean for the program and the community; and
- partners think about what, if anything, the partnership will do differently because of what it learned from the evaluation.

Finally, remember that teachers often play a central role in an evaluation by reporting information on student outcomes, such as improvements in completing homework, following directions, and staying

on task (Illback, 1993). To minimize their workload, make sure that teachers develop efficient record-keeping procedures and have adequate time to complete the task.

Summary

Evaluations help build ownership of strategies among partners, guide program improvement, build accountability, test innovative ideas, support school reform, ensure strong communication and organization, and document the need for policy changes. School staff and their partners should be involved in each of the following steps: (**1**) identifying the purpose of evaluation, the information needs of stakeholders, and the partnership's assumptions about change; (**2**) identifying useful indicators of progress and results that meet information needs; (**3**) selecting techniques for gathering information; (**4**) developing a system for maintaining records and other information; and (**5**) developing a feedback loop for using evaluation information to improve school-linked strategies.

Chapter 5

Moving from Vision to Action

What forms do comprehensive school-linked strategies take?

What are key considerations in moving toward action?

How do partnerships organize for successful action?

What are key factors for effective staffing?

AFTER YOUR PARTNERSHIP HAS LAID A FOUNDATION FOR comprehensive school-linked strategies by conducting a community assessment, defining a shared vision, and gathering partners, you are ready to bring the effort to life. In taking action, effective comprehensive strategies follow a set of guidelines that by now should look very familiar. Comprehensive strategies simultaneously bring multiple stakeholders together; include all of the community's groups in implementation; and provide a mix of programs, services, supports, and opportunities that reflect a broad, holistic response to local conditions. This chapter explores the forms that comprehensive strategies can take; key considerations in moving strategies from vision toward action; ways that programs organize for successful action; and ideas for effective staffing.

What Forms Do Comprehensive School-linked Strategies Take?

Comprehensive strategies can — and should — take a variety of forms, depending on the unique circumstances of a community. Some typical models are family resource centers, community school programs, information and referral systems, and comprehensive school-linked health programs.

Family resource centers are often located in schools, community centers, or public housing developments. Their approach is to strengthen

families by enhancing parenting skills, preventing crises, and connecting families to an array of existing resources. Many of these programs are operated by families for families in the community (Family Resource Coalition Report, 1993). For example, the Fort Pierce (Florida) Family Service Center, located on an elementary school campus, offers health and mental health care, parent education, family literacy, child care, and human services.

Community school programs envision schools as the hubs of a community. In contrast to family resource centers, they provide services to all members of a community, not just children and their families (Minzey & LeTarte, 1994). Community school strategies typically include adult education and skill development; youth-focused activities, such as Scouts of America or Boys and Girls clubs; athletic programs; tutoring and mentoring; and other programs that help students build academic and social skills. Community school programs also emphasize informal community opportunities and links with community agencies.

For example, I.S. 218 in Washington Heights, New York, is a partnership between the school system and the nonprofit Children's Aid Society. The school incorporates a community medical and dental clinic; before- and after-school programs; and a resource center that links the community with employment, housing, public assistance, adult education, drug prevention, and help with immigration issues.

Information and referral programs are designed to increase families' access to resources by improving communication among agencies and by reducing transportation and eligibility barriers. Although they usually do not provide direct services, these programs may utilize a case management approach, in which a single worker acts as a broker or connector for families. For example, a school district in Minnesota uses family advocates to link families to appropriate resources. The program targets students in kindergarten through eighth grade and their families, emphasizing collaboration among parents, teachers, and service providers. Family advocates meet with families in the families' homes, in the evening or on weekends to learn about their economic and cultural issues, health and legal concerns, and mental health and educational needs. The family advocates also talk with teachers about family dynamics that may affect student learning.

School-based and school-linked comprehensive health programs primarily serve children, although some are open to entire families and communities. Through its connection with schools, this model enables health

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and mental health-care providers to reach children who might otherwise have no access to health care or preventive health services.

This model focuses primarily on a broad range of health services. For example, health clinics based at high schools in Multnomah County (Oregon) offer routine and sports-related physical exams; diagnosis and treatment of minor illness or injury; general infection checks; routine testing for students who have a family history of diabetes or anemia; vision, dental, and blood pressure screening; immunizations; HIV/AIDS prevention counseling and testing; nutrition education and weight management; mental health counseling; counseling on smoking cessation, peer trust, and other issues prevalent among adolescents; substance abuse support services; and referrals to other health and human service providers.

Comprehensive Health Programs Combine a Range of Services

- Immunizations, preventive health screenings, and physical exams
- Head Start screenings
- Dental education and care
- Health education and classroom-based health curricula
- Care for chronic and serious health conditions
- Counseling for mental health issues, drug abuse, and sexual abuse
- Violence prevention programs
- Case management and home visits
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) nutrition services
- Prenatal care and parenting education

As your partnership chooses a model or develops a new one, partners should consider two key points: (**1**) the model should be appropriate to the developmental levels of children, including those with disabilities; and (**2**) the model should reflect the cultural and linguistic preferences of the community.

Responding to the Developmental Levels of Children

Effective strategies accommodate children of different ages and levels of learning. For example:

- **Young children** benefit from programs that provide and link high-quality child care and education; family support; parent

education; home visits; immunizations and physical exams; nutrition programs; and transitions to school.

- **Elementary school students** benefit from programs that promote the physical health necessary for learning; socialization with peers; positive relationships with peers and adults; learning opportunities as part of after-school care; tutoring; mentoring; and parenting education to support school success.
- **Middle and high school students** benefit from programs that offer conflict resolution; health care; participation in community service; substance abuse treatment and prevention; violence prevention; job training and employment; assistance in the transition from school to work; and education and counseling for students and parents with an emphasis on adolescent and family issues.

Remember, a truly comprehensive partnership doesn't simply provide these services — it links, aligns, coordinates, and collaborates with people, programs, opportunities, and assets to strengthen children, families, and the community.

Reflecting Cultural and Language Preferences

Children, families, and community members may not participate in comprehensive strategies unless the services and approach reflect the community's cultural diversity and an understanding of how cultural differences affect families' attitudes.

The following approaches can help your comprehensive strategies be more responsive:

Responsiveness to cultural and linguistic preferences extends far beyond printing materials in multiple languages or celebrating holidays of diverse cultures.

Know how people become informed. Do families read local newspapers and newsletters? Do they receive the majority of their information through radio and television? If so, from which stations? Do most families have telephones? Is there an effective "phone tree" in the school community? Or do community members tend to gather in a park, at school, or at a corner grocery store to discuss issues? Are there religious leaders and elders who coordinate communication within the community?

Hire staff who reflect the community. When families walk in the door of a program and find employees and volunteers who reflect the diversity of the community, they are more apt to feel at home. Staff who can speak families' home languages help make community members feel comfortable and increase their participation in the partnership.

Know how people perceive schools and other institutions. In many communities, families trust schools and see them as helpful institutions. In others, families may respect schools and academic achievement but feel uncomfortable sharing family issues or revealing needs to school staff. Families with little formal education or history of school success may avoid interactions with schools altogether. At a school-linked program in Southern California, members of one cultural group were reluctant to visit the program counselor even though he was from the same culture. However, parents frequently called the counselor in the evening or visited him at home — saying they didn't want to bother him at his job. Program planners eventually changed the counselor's hours and office location so he could work in the community in the evening, where people were more comfortable meeting with him.

What Are Key Considerations in Moving Toward Action?

Previous chapters have explored many of the principles that guide successful comprehensive strategies. Eight of these principles, adapted from Schorr (1994), raise particularly important issues for partnerships moving toward action:

Effective Strategies are Comprehensive and Responsive

Do your partnership's comprehensive strategies combine a range of services and opportunities to meet the needs identified by families? Are these elements combined into a system, rather than being a collection of unconnected services and programs?

Above all, children and families should consistently hear, "Let's see what we can do about that," or "How can we work with you on that issue?"

Effective Strategies Focus on Children and Families

Does your school-linked comprehensive program focus on making families feel welcome at all times? Are families treated with respect and made to feel important? Do program staff know families' views on the issues that affect them and work with families to help them achieve their goals?

Effective Strategies Reduce Barriers to Participation

Do you have systems to simplify eligibility requirements and procedures for a range of programs and to reduce paperwork so families fill out as few forms as possible? Can community agencies develop a single point of entry to services so a family only needs to share detailed and confidential information once? (For example, one school district near Chicago created a comprehensive school registration form and process that also collects Head Start eligibility data and links families with family advocates.) Do your strategies also reduce barriers by producing documents and correspondence in all languages spoken in the community and by providing interpreters at meetings and work sessions? Do front-line staff work to communicate in language that is clear and easily understood? Are program staff proactive in ensuring that students and families actually receive the services or take advantage of the opportunities to which they are referred?

Parents deepen their involvement in comprehensive strategies through volunteering their time or donating resources.

Effective Strategies Build Partnerships between Parents and Professionals

Are parents involved with professionals in moving the strategies toward action? Are parents and community residents employed in programs that form your comprehensive strategies and provided with opportunities for professional development?

Effective Strategies Are Geographically and Psychologically Accessible

In choosing a site or sites for elements of its comprehensive strategies, has the partnership looked for the best locations to reach children and families? Has your group considered the school itself, separate buildings on school grounds, or sharing a Head Start office? Is there a community or cultural center where families and children are most comfortable? Could an unused school building be turned into a center where many agencies work together under one roof? Are parents interested in developing and running family resource centers?

Effective Strategies Are Flexible and Resourceful

Are program staff able to meet at times that are convenient for children and families? Where can families comfortably meet with staff: in schools, homes, public housing developments, or community centers?

Tips for Taking Action: Issues to Consider in Selecting Sites

- Is the site close to affordable, reliable public transportation?
- Is it near other places in the school or community where parents and families naturally and frequently gather?
- Is it in on a street where families feel safe?
- If the site is in a school, is it close enough to other activities to ensure good communication between center and school staff? (If it is on the far side of the baseball diamond, teachers may never drop in to talk.)

Effective Strategies Focus on Prevention without Neglecting Families' Immediate Concerns

Can families and children receive help before a crisis occurs? Does your program provide for: prenatal care for women in the first trimester of pregnancy? home visits to strengthen parenting skills? immunizations and physical exams for children at a school or other community site? and counseling and drop-in services for families under stress?

Can you help families find ways to get out of crises so that they can benefit from preventive activities? Can your comprehensive strategies respond to the needs of families who may be in a constant state of crisis, such as those who are homeless?

Program staff should be able to respond to emergency situations without bureaucratic constraints. For example, if staff have access to small amounts of cash, they can quickly help a family buy a new pair of shoes for a child, pay taxi fare, or pay the deposit on gas and electric services.

Effective Strategies Possess Relentless Problem-solving Capacity

Are the individuals involved in school-linked strategies energetic and relentless in their efforts to effect positive change? Can they approach new challenges creatively and work as a team to develop solutions?

Parents as Problem Solvers

A group of parents at a school in Miami who were concerned about an epidemic of head lice realized that some families could not afford medicated shampoos and could not take time off from work to address the problem. The parent group formed a special team of "Lice Busters," equipped with shampoo and a vacuum cleaner, and visited families' homes to eradicate the lice.

How Do Partnerships Organize for Successful Action?

A comprehensive partnership's success depends on sound organization as well as sound design. The governance structures and guidelines for partner relationships discussed in Chapter 1 are part of a strong organization. As your partnership moves toward action, you will also need to develop (**1**) an infrastructure for program operations; (**2**) systems to organize information and communication; (**3**) a process for determining eligibility for programs; and (**4**) confidentiality protocols for sharing information.

Developing Infrastructure

Infrastructure refers to the internal support systems and procedures that keep things running smoothly. Each comprehensive partnership must develop systems that can effectively handle the daily flow of information and work among partners and within programs. These systems should also respond to problems that may arise. An effective infrastructure must include, for example:

- technology for determining eligibility for multiple programs;
- staff development systems; and
- family education and participation opportunities.

A sound infrastructure helps comprehensive strategies run smoothly and uniformly and builds solid programs that achieve their goals. For example, you may want to formalize the commitments you obtained from your collaborative partners (see Chapter 2) by developing interagency agreements spelling out details of shared responsibility, resources, and authority. An agreement may cover the use of buildings, playgrounds and vehicles; payment for utilities and custodial services; staff time for direct services, planning, management, and publicity; funds and personnel to provide staff development; and allocation of in-kind agency supports such as printing and mailing.

Establishing Communication, Information, and Publicity Systems

These systems help collaborative partners communicate with each other efficiently, manage information within and across individual programs, and share information with community members who are not part of the partnership. A well-planned information system that helps a partnership collect, analyze, and distribute information can improve the coordination of services and relieve the record-keeping burden on staff.

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Many computer software programs are available to simplify record keeping, allow communication across agency lines, and connect to the information systems of major agencies. Before investing in a new system, however, find out which systems your partners already use, and build systems to communicate with them. State education agencies often know which information systems have been used successfully by other comprehensive partnerships.

A system for publicizing information about comprehensive strategies is also important. Good publicity broadens support for programs and informs other communities of the potential of school-linked strategies. A publicity system shares information with:

- **Agencies and schools,** whose staff members need to know about changes going on in their organizations and the implications of these changes for them. When a school makes a commitment to be part of a school-linked partnership, teachers want to know that students' needs are being met — and they want to learn new ways to modify their classrooms to better help children succeed. Staffs that are well informed about strategies are more apt to support them and to refer families and students. Program staff are often asked by community members to explain the strategies; knowing about projected changes, important new issues, and success stories will increase their effectiveness as informal program representatives.
- **Families and community members,** who want to know what the partnership offers them and how they can contribute to its success. They should be informed of its goals, programs, services, and upcoming events and be invited to provide feedback. They should also be informed about opportunities for sharing their expertise, time, and energy with programs and partners.
- **The greater community,** which will support strategies that are recognized as effective and responsive. Through community outreach, comprehensive strategies recruit new partners; attract volunteer staff, financial resources, and in-kind contributions; and build momentum for larger institutional change.

Determining Eligibility

Comprehensive strategies should be available to all families and all family members so that no family feels left out or stigmatized. If your strategies cannot connect all families with all programs, try to develop an initial screening process to help families identify and gain access to

programs from which they may benefit. Avoid asking families to travel from one agency to another looking for help.

Eligibility should not be linked to a family's ability to pay a fee. Although many comprehensive programs provide a variety of services without charge, it is also appropriate at times to ask parents to pay a nominal fee for programs such as child care. But it is never acceptable to charge a fee if it prevents a family from gaining access to services, opportunities, or resources.

Protecting Confidentiality

Collaborative partners need to be able to share information about families' assets and conditions in order to coordinate a comprehensive, holistic response. But families may worry about the confidentiality of private information. This concern can prevent some families from participating in comprehensive strategies altogether. School and agency staff may also be concerned about sharing private information across agency lines. They may have different notions about how confidentiality should be handled, based on their professional experience and protocols.

School and agency personnel may have different notions about how confidentiality should be handled, based on their professional training and organizational culture.

To resolve confidentiality issues, encourage families, schools, and agency partners to learn about each other's concerns and legal constraints, and create a set of guidelines that are acceptable to all groups. It's important to build consensus on this issue; clearly stated guidelines that are understood and used by all front-line staff foster trust among partners. To reassure families, explain that no information is shared with agencies unless parents have seen it first and are willing to share it. Families often will let agencies share information in order to develop a comprehensive plan for services and supports. Legal staff from school districts and other partner agencies can help develop agreements or consent forms between families and agencies to allow for information sharing.

For example, a program in Pennsylvania that works with migrant families developed a uniform release form that allows information sharing across agency boundaries to help staff combine and coordinate programs for individual families. You may also want to provide a family bill of rights or written policy about confidentiality that parents can easily understand.

Tips for Taking Action: Respect Families' Confidentiality

Front-line staff should understand state and local regulations regarding information sharing and confidentiality. Regulations vary from state to state and within local jurisdictions, and can be obtained from each government agency. In addition, the Federal Education Rights of Privacy Act (FERPA) sets guidelines for what types of information schools can release, and to whom.

What Are Key Factors for Effective Staffing?

As your partnership moves from vision to action — with real staff people in real communities beginning to interact with real children and families — you will face some very practical staffing issues. For example, a staff may be composed of individuals from several different partner agencies who do not necessarily share the same practices, protocols, or expectations. Partner agencies may also experience staff turnover.

Successful comprehensive partnerships have used the following approaches to address such staffing challenges:

Create a New Organizational Culture

Frequently, school-linked comprehensive strategies are staffed with employees from existing agencies who are "repositioned" or moved from a position within a single agency to an interagency position. Don't underestimate the changes this requires of staff, even those who volunteer to make the change. Invest some time and effort in building a new organizational culture, new norms of communication, new relationships with families and communities, and a system of supervision and accountability that works for staff from all partner agencies.

Build a Cohesive Staff

Comprehensive strategies often attract staff from agencies outside the partnership. Outside staff can bring additional knowledge of the community, experiences in diverse cultures, and fresh perspectives of community members and nonprofit organizations. But in order to build a cohesive staff from diverse organizations and backgrounds, you must select staff carefully and foster a team spirit.

Try to involve staff who come to the comprehensive program voluntarily, rather than being assigned by their agencies. Advertise job openings within agencies, and invite key stakeholders to participate in

interviewing and hiring. Look for staff who have knowledge of the neighborhood and community, commitment to the vision and philosophy of the program, an ability to adapt to change, and a sense of accountability for work performance.

Tips for Taking Action: Developing Communication among Staff

- Designate one person as the primary contact for communication at the school and one person as the primary contact at the comprehensive strategies program. Often, the principal or assistant principal assumes this role for the school and the coordinator or program director assumes it for the program.
- Develop a simple written referral form for school staff to use to communicate concerns to program staff.
- Respond promptly to referrals from school staff and indicate which staff members will follow up with the child and the family; provide feedback to school staff instantly.
- Follow up with teachers who make referrals to make sure that your collaborative efforts are improving students' conditions, behavior, and academic achievement.

Ease Staff Transitions

Turnover among agency staff can create havoc for students and families; loss of key staff can be especially disruptive. To minimize the negative effects of staff changes and to provide smooth transitions:

- Increase the number of individuals within an agency who participate in planning and decisionmaking for the program. Shared leadership means that the program's continuity will not depend on a single individual.
- Establish a transition period for orienting new professional staff.
- Document the history and process of the partnership, so new staff can read up on how the program operated in the past.
- Provide time for professional staff to meet with peers in other comprehensive strategies programs.

As partners move to put a vision into action, they often seek information about similar programs. Your partnership may want to:

- Visit a similar program. Many programs encourage visitors; some have scheduled times when the staff and parents make presentations for visitors. As you plan your visit, be sure to invite representative partners, allow time for group discussion about what they want to learn, and provide good opportunities for partners to share their learning with the rest of the group afterwards. Encourage visitors to take cameras, videocameras, and/or tape recorders to capture their impressions and share them with others.
- Invite presentations from other programs. To build enthusiasm among a larger group, invite a team from another partnership to come and talk. Work with your partnership to develop a list of questions in advance to ensure that the presentation meets your needs. And plan to spend enough time with your visitors to get a complete picture, including the challenges that the group still faces.

Moving from vision to action isn't always easy. Sometimes groups have different opinions about which approach will yield the best results. To avoid creating winners and losers within your partnership, consider taking a "study group" approach. In a study group, partners form a small subcommittee that meets regularly over a period of time to gain new knowledge about an issue and develop an informed consensus. Some group members may choose to read a book (and find ways to describe the content to members who learn better in other ways) or bring in guest speakers who are informed about the topic. The study group approach requires a commitment of time and thoughtful inquiry, but it deepens partners' involvement and develops shared commitment to solutions.

Teachers and Parents Learn Together to Resolve Issues

Teachers at an elementary school in Phoenix, Arizona realized that the large number of students entering first grade from non-English-speaking homes was limiting the teachers' ability to keep classroom instruction on pace. The teachers knew they needed a strategy for helping children make the transition to the primary grades, but they weren't sure what to do. So, the teachers developed a series of seminars where they could study the issue; each teacher led the group in a different topic. Next, the teachers held workshops for parents to share what they had learned and solicit feedback. At the end of the second year of study, the teachers and 300 parent partners asked the school board for a waiver allowing them to dramatically restructure classrooms. The waiver they received enabled parents and teachers to create more personalized, multi-age classrooms in which every entering group of nine students has the same teacher through first, second, and third grade. The school also developed teams of health and mental health providers to offer additional support.

Summary

Comprehensive strategies are implemented in several ways — most often through family resource centers, community school programs, information and referral programs, or school-based or school-linked comprehensive health programs. The model your partnership chooses should be appropriate to the developmental levels of children and should reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community.

Several principles of effective comprehensive strategies raise issues for partnerships as they move from planning toward action. These include:

- being comprehensive and responsive;
- focusing on children and families;
- reducing barriers to participation;
- building partnerships between parents and professionals;
- being geographically and psychologically accessible;
- being flexible and resourceful;
- focusing on prevention without neglecting families' immediate concerns; and
- possessing relentless problem-solving capacity.

Partnerships organize for successful action by developing (1) an infrastructure for program operations, (2) systems to organize information

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and communication, (3) a process for determining program eligibility, and (4) confidentiality protocols for sharing information.

Successful partnerships address staffing challenges by creating an organizational culture that defines new relationships, eases staff transitions, and works to build a cohesive staff.

Chapter 6

Maintaining Momentum in Collaboration

How can partnerships sustain their commitment to collaborative action?

What techniques help maintain a partnership during periods of membership and leadership change?

How can partnerships deal with community controversy over school-linked strategies?

How can staff working in comprehensive strategies be supported and validated?

COLLABORATIONS DO NOT SURVIVE WITHOUT THOUGHTFUL AND continual attention. Sustaining a partnership — and the comprehensive strategies it promotes — requires flexibility and resourcefulness.

Partners must meet regularly to communicate and to reexamine their goals in order to keep programs focused on a shared vision and connected to the communities they serve. Partners also must adapt to changes in membership, leadership, and funding. They must support front-line staff members who work under stress. And they must respond to any controversy in the community related to comprehensive strategies.

This chapter examines issues and solutions involved in sustaining strategies over time.

How Can Partnerships Sustain Their Commitment to Collaborative Action?

Long-lasting, productive partnerships suggest it's important to review — and, if necessary, refocus — the partnership's vision regularly. A comprehensive partnership's vitality depends on its continuing ability to identify important issues and harness the creative energy of stakeholders in schools, in community agencies and organizations, and in the community for long-term change. Does the original vision still accurately reflect community conditions and concerns? Are the partnership's strategies for addressing these conditions still on track? What changes in funding sources and

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levels, staffing, political support, or other factors have occurred or may occur within the partner agencies? What impact will these changes have on children and families and on the comprehensive strategies?

Use public celebrations of your partnership's accomplishments to keep interest in your partnership alive. Invite agencies and individuals whose ideas have been successful to turn their energy to new undertakings. Remember that many small successes fit into a larger strategy of strengthening a community — that creating one safe intersection can lead to making an entire community safe for children.

Remember that many small successes fit into a larger strategy of strengthening an entire community.

Partnerships need to be aware of new challenges and opportunities. Is the police department beginning a program of community policing that could build connections between community members and police? Are new highways being planned that will cut through the community? Is the board of education planning to close a local school? Have sudden layoffs by a major employer put families under stress? How will these events affect the community — and how can your partnership attract new collaborators to help address them?

Finding time to focus on future issues or to reflect on past progress is difficult when current activities demand immediate attention. Many partnerships schedule special meetings two or three times a year that are devoted to assessing their progress, pace, and direction. Consider scheduling these meetings for an entire day or weekend, so participants are not distracted by other obligations.

It can be hard to take time to focus on future issues or to reflect on past progress when current activities demand immediate attention. Many partnerships schedule special meetings two or three times a year that are devoted to assessing their program's progress, pace, and direction.

During these periodic meetings, use the assessment and evaluation information that programs have collected to focus on measurable results. This information can broaden the discussion by indicating issues that are not readily observable. For example, records may show a drop in participation at a counseling or health center, alerting partners to the need to find out why.

Be sure to include all members of the partnership — not just a few leaders or a small committee of partners — in periodic focus groups, community forums, site-based meetings, or retreats to assess progress. Otherwise, your partnership may lose the support and voices of the children and families at its core.

A Time for Action and a Time for Reflection

Agency directors, county commissioners, parents, program staff, and the policy board from one comprehensive partnership hold retreats at least twice a year to assess the progress and direction of their partnership toward agency and school reform and toward meeting its goals. At the retreats, all stakeholders reflect on issues that have surfaced during the last six months, such as staff turnover or changes in funding levels. They also consider trends, successes, new ideas, and concerns that families and staff bring to the table. The partners rarely need to implement major shifts in program direction because they maintain their connection to the community and responsiveness to its needs. At a recent retreat, the partners decided they had been so successful in meeting their initial goals that they would begin to tackle more challenging, broader problems in the school community.

What Techniques Can Help Maintain a Partnership during Periods of Membership and Leadership Change?

All partnerships eventually experience change among participating agencies, leaders, members of councils, and parent groups. Agency directors may move on to other positions, alliances with new agencies may form, or longtime leaders may choose to leave. Within programs, some attrition among parents, committee members, and volunteers is also inevitable (for a discussion of staff turnover, see Chapter 5).

Change within your partnership need not be disruptive if your strategies are designed to accommodate it. Successful partnerships use the following techniques to accommodate change:

Involve a large number of individuals in leadership. Working by consensus from the inception of a partnership prevents factions from developing among agencies or individuals; shared leadership ensures that many partners understand their organizational history and that the partnership does not depend on any one person or agency.

Use structured orientation sessions or mentoring systems to ease new partners into their roles. One school-linked program holds monthly seminars to explain the partnership's vision and design to new volunteers, partnership members, parents, staff, interested community members, and agency personnel. This system orients new participants and also keeps the community informed.

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Mentoring Systems Ease New Partners into New Roles

One highly effective school-linked partnership had experienced a complete turnover of agency executives by its third year. Partners found it was necessary to invest a large amount of time and energy to orient new directors during these leadership transitions. But because the partnership had established a truly collaborative operating style, the effectiveness and continuity of the effort were not interrupted.

The same school-linked partnership found that changeovers in middle management within participating agencies did not happen as smoothly as those at the executive level. To improve these transitions, the partnership's governing council created a "buddy system" to orient new middle managers working with the partnership. Established members were asked to mentor new members for several months. The new system minimized the time it took new members to become productive.

How Can Partnerships Deal With Community Controversy over School-linked Strategies?

When they are kept informed about program progress and activities, most parents, community members, local officials, and agency directors support comprehensive strategies. Even so, comprehensive strategies can provoke controversy in some communities.

Such controversy is usually caused by misinformation and misunderstandings. Some community members may think that these programs dilute the primary instructional mission of schools and insist that education funds should not be diverted from academics to support more holistic activities, such as health care and human services.

Your partnership can reduce the chance of controversy through proactive efforts to communicate with community members through the following actions:

Reach out to your critics. Bring them to see the program. Listen to their concerns and answer their questions openly. Provide opportunities for them to contribute to decisionmaking.

Develop good written communication. An inexpensive newsletter that clearly highlights short, positive news items is an effective way to tell the story of your partnership. It should convey the partnership's vision and mission in easy-to-understand language. Print the newsletter in English and any other major languages spoken in the community. Distribute it widely

— to parents, business owners, religious leaders, community advocates, and agency representatives.

Designate a spokesperson who is easily accessible and can provide a consistent response to questions. To prevent the community from receiving incorrect information from an uninformed source, designate one person to answer inquiries from reporters and other sources and to speak at public gatherings. However, do not inhibit other partners from talking openly about the strategies in the community.

Keep participants well informed. Parents and community members are part of an information grapevine flowing with news. They can promote and describe the program through word of mouth, which is perhaps the best publicity a program can have. Nurture this unofficial flow of positive information by being sure parents and community members are involved in all phases of the effort and by keeping them informed about current activities.

Parents and community members are part of a community grapevine flowing with news. They can promote and defend the program through word of mouth, which is perhaps the best publicity a program can have.

Keep local leaders informed. Community leaders, including elected officials, should know about the partnership's progress because they may need to answer questions from the media or concerned constituents. Newsletters are one effective communications tool, but personal contact and invitations to visit program sites make a more lasting impression on policymakers. Hold open house events to brief officials and to provide an opportunity for parents and community members to interact with policymakers.

Make good communication a priority. Designate a troubleshooter for each program within the comprehensive partnership — the program coordinator or another staff person — who will keep information flowing and address any internal misunderstandings. Matters as simple as receiving copies of meeting minutes can take on significance if individuals or agencies sense there is unequal access to information and decisionmaking among partners. The troubleshooters can confront these brewing tensions and prevent them from erupting into public controversies.

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Disseminate pertinent data from assessments and evaluations. Share details on how your strategies have improved academic performance, school attendance, student health, or other conditions. Compare the costs to what it would cost the community if the comprehensive strategies were not available. Keep this information updated and available to use in presentations, newsletters, meetings, and press releases.

Share The Bottom Line: Show That Programs Are Cost Effective and Get Results

In New Jersey, 42 School-based Youth Service Centers offer supports and opportunities for children and youth to help them graduate from school and lead healthy lives. Students can drop in at the centers or be referred by teachers, parents, or the courts. Last year, the state-funded program reduced pregnancy at one high school from 20 to two cases a year. The centers spend $200 a year on each child or youth who participates, while Aid to Families with Dependent Children spends approximately $9,500 a year to support a teenage mother and one child.

In 1992 Vermont expanded its home visiting service by introducing a Success by Six program to reach every family in the state with a preschool child. Home visits are conducted by school nurses and by staff from parent/child centers and health departments. The program resulted in a marked decrease in the number of child abuse victims in the state during a two-year period, including a 17 percent decrease in abuse of children between birth and age six.

How Can Staff Working in Comprehensive Strategies Be Supported and Validated?

School-linked comprehensive strategies are fortunate to attract staff who are hard-working, optimistic, and committed to working with children and families. Yet several factors can create stress for these key players, making it essential to provide them support. These factors include:

- dedicated staff at all levels — agency professionals, teachers, principals, receptionists, and other school support staff — frequently take on too much work and responsibility;
- comprehensive strategies, like any new, innovative approach, involve change and uncertainty; and

- language, assumptions, and practices vary among and within agencies and including schools. Staff who have relocated to a comprehensive program from other agencies may feel like outsiders in a new culture, especially if the program site is a school whose environment may seem insular and resistant to outside influence. Differences in organizational culture may create friction among staff from various agencies who are placed together at a new site.

In an environment of uncertainty or change, partners will feel more comfortable if they understand which elements of the program they can influence. Include front-line staff in the partnership's decisionmaking and other events, so they feel informed and empowered.

Communication also helps alleviate the tensions caused by cultural differences. If staff can come together in support groups or meetings to discuss their insights, philosophies, and methods of working with children and families, they are more likely to bridge the differences in their organizational cultures and work together smoothly.

Open communication alleviates the tensions created by cultural differences.

Cultivate open lines of communication among all levels of staff — from the front lines to the director's office — and among partner agencies so all staff know that their concerns are heard and that they will have help in handling problems. Take time to convene staff in support groups, meetings, and conferences where they can communicate with their partners. And encourage program administrators within the partnership to listen to staff at every level and to make communication a priority.

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Learning Opportunities

As your partnership works to sustain its momentum, remember to pause periodically to reflect on the progress and direction of your effort. Many partnerships schedule "retreats" several times a year. In a retreat, partners set aside a block of time (from half day to a long weekend) away from the usual business location to renew their commitment to the strategies. A retreat does not require a long trip or a fancy location, but it does require attention to people and to issues. In a retreat, partners often:

- schedule time for small groups of stakeholders to get to know each other personally;
- bring along new partners to deepen their understanding of the history and commitment of the partnership;
- work intensively on specific issues facing the partnership, to bring disagreements to the surface and develop consensus;
- form responses to changes in leadership, funding, and community issues; and
- develop and practice skills in shared decisionmaking and group leadership so that changes in a partnership's membership don't threaten continuity.

Summary

The qualities that make school-linked strategies effective — collaboration, creativity and openness to change — also help partnerships maintain strength and momentum. As partners become more adept at tackling challenges, the partnership becomes increasingly effective and efficient. The satisfaction of crafting productive, responsive strategies for children and families helps move a partnership forward. Specific techniques that also maintain a partnership's vitality include revisiting shared goals, supporting staff, and dealing with controversy.

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Appendix A

Federal Support for Links between Schools and Comprehensive Strategies

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1994 provides children in targeted assistance schools a portion of Title I funds if other public and private sources do not meet a variety of needs including basic medical equipment; eyeglasses and hearing aids; compensation for a school-linked services coordinator; development and training for parents in identifying and meeting the comprehensive needs of their children; and professional development for teachers, pupil services personnel, and other staff.

Title XI of ESEA allows local school districts the flexibility to reallocate up to 5 percent of the funds they receive under ESEA to programs of school-linked comprehensive services. Districts must submit a separate application to use ESEA funds in this way.

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act recognizes and supports the need for a more comprehensive approach by providing resources to states and communities to develop and implement comprehensive education reforms aimed at helping all students reach challenging standards for academic achievement and occupational skills. The law addresses school readiness; school completion; competency in challenging subject matter; science and mathematics achievement; literacy; safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools; and parental participation. Goals 2000 asks states and local education agencies to create broad-based planning groups that include educators; parents; business leaders; and representatives of health, community, and human service agencies.

The Family Preservation and Support Program provides funding for states to improve the well-being of vulnerable children and their families, particularly those experiencing or at risk of abuse and neglect. States are encouraged to use the program as a catalyst for establishing a continuum of coordinated, integrated, culturally relevant, and family focused services. Activities range from preventive efforts that develop strong families to intervention services for families in crisis.

The Head Start Program, as reauthorized in 1994, funds state collaboration project grants that help build early childhood systems and access to comprehensive services as well as supports for low-income children in every state.

Even Start, administered by the U.S. Department of Education, provides federal "glue money" for local collaborative efforts to improve family literacy through early childhood education, parenting education, adult basic education, and parent-child interactions. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994 contains provisions that suggest collaboration between Even Start, Head Start, and Title I efforts.

Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities, administered by the Department of Education, supports comprehensive strategies that include drug prevention curricula and programs linking schools and communities.

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Appendix B

Suggested Resources

Basic Elements of Effective Strategies

Bruner, C., Kunesh, L. G., & Knuth, R. A. (1992). *Guidebook 8: Integrating community services.* Guidebook Series on *Schools that work: The research advantage.* Oak Brook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

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Building Collaborative Partnerships

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General

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Ordering Information

Copies of this guidebook are available from the Regional Educational Laboratories, which are supported by contracts with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

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email: lss@vm.temple.edu
Internet: http://www.temple.edu/departments/LSS/
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email: info@ncrel.org
Internet: http://www.ncrel.org/ncrel/ncrel.html
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Internet: http://www.sedl.org
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